

2004

Musical play across ethnic boundaries in western Jamaica

Ronald Eric Dickerson

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dickerson, Ronald Eric, "Musical play across ethnic boundaries in western Jamaica" (2004). *LSU Master's Theses*. 1865.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/1865

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

MUSICAL PLAY
ACROSS ETHNIC BOUNDARIES
IN WESTERN JAMAICA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
Ronald Eric Dickerson
B.A., Louisiana State University, 1999
December, 2004

DEDICATION

For my Father
Ronald Edward Dickerson
1944-2003

Thank you for everything.

I pray for a son like you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Highest thanks to the almighty creator, for guidance and protection in all things, and for allowing me to do this work. My Mother and Father, Virginia and Ronald, taught me to love learning, and for that I give thanks. Thank you Mama, for more than I can ever say, especially for making sure I was in trouble if I missed the school bus. Also, without the help of my sister Renéé, graduate study would never have even been an option for me, and for that sacrifice I am truly grateful.

I wish to thank the Genus, Brooks, and Huggins families, for the kind hospitality and help they provided my wife and me during our fieldwork in St. Elizabeth Parish, Jamaica. Likewise, my consultants Duse Thaxter, Iunty I Ion, the Ion Ites of Rastafari, and George Huggins deserve my sincere thanks for their patience, tolerance, and hard work in collaborating with me on this project.

For mentorship and inspiration, I thank Joyce Jackson and Miles Richardson. Helen Regis also deserves great recognition for her guidance and endurance, shepherding me through difficult circumstances as I wrote this thesis. Jill Brody, Paul Thacker, Dydia Delyser, and Kent Mathewson each provided invaluable help in their own ways. Special thanks to my graduate colleagues in the department, Paul Watts, Chris Dalbom, Francis Currin, and Rebecca Sheehan, who provided valuable comments on chapter two, in the context of Dr. Delyser's writing seminar. Thanks also to the Robert C. West Fund, in the Department of Geography and Anthropology, for partially funding a ten-day period of fieldwork during January, 2003.

Ultimately, I owe huge thanks and acknowledgement to my wife and fieldwork partner, Mandy G. Dickerson. Working side-by-side with her has been tough, because she raises the standards of diligence and integrity for both of us.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER	
ONE INTRODUCTION	1
TWO RESISTANCE, FESTIVAL, AND SECRECY: GEORGE HUGGINS AND THE MAROONS OF ACCOMPONG TOWN	23
THREE <i>DREAD POETICS INNA DANCEHALL</i> AND AMPHITHEATRE: IUNTY I ION AND THE ION ITES OF RASTAFARI	51
FOUR AFRICAN-JAMAICAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AS FOLKLORE, ENTERTAINMENT, AND IDENTITY POLITICS: DUSE THAXTER AND THE NEW CREATORS OF <i>KUMINA</i>	82
FIVE CONCLUSION	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
APPENDIX: GLOSSARY	113
VITA	120

ABSTRACT

An ethnography of music, ritual, and festival in western Jamaica, this thesis reports on fieldwork performed in St. Elizabeth and St. James Parishes between June 2002 and January 2003. Featured field sites include rural dancehall events, Kumina performances, Accompong Town's Maroon Heritage Festival, and a Rastafarian music and nutrition festival called "The Supper of Rastafari." Building an account of these and other sites of cultural performance, this study focuses on social connections between groups of participants, traced through poetic, historical, and personal relationships among performers, especially across boundaries of ethnic, stylistic, or religious difference within Jamaica's national cultural identity.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

We must begin to think of a situation where the word/concepts sacred and secular are practically meaningless; or rather where they connote a certain type of intensification of a shared organic experience. Politics, then, psychology, economics, prophecy, medicine, law, poetry, music, dance, art may all be seen as aspects of ‘religion’ and religion as aspects of all these (Brathwaite 1978:46).

This study is an ethnographic account built around my ongoing fieldwork in Western Jamaica. I am engaged in participant observation focused on musical performances; expressive events produced at the grassroots scale, at home, in the park, outside of a store on a country lane, and on hallowed ground. Below, I will tell some stories about how people *do* music in Jamaica. I hope to reveal how social and political alliances, dual memberships, poetic affinities and oppositions inform the local traditions through which participants shape and reshape their musical practices, as they work together to produce collective statements of cultural identity through musical performance and festival.

Each of the following three chapters features an expert consultant, and these roughly correspond to three Jamaican ethnic groups. I use the term “ethnic group” in the sense proposed by Barbara Kopytoff (1976:34) in her discussion of Jamaican Maroon identity. She defined an ethnic group as a “culture-bearing” group:

A group with common cultural norms that are developed and maintained through the interaction of its members. This concept deals with “culture” not as a collection of discrete traits, but as a continuing product of group interaction, a live and constantly adjusting set of patterns that makes social life possible. ... Culture-bearing groups may be overlapping, and an individual may belong to more than one group at a time.

Using this definition, Jamaica seems a heterogeneous place, with many ethnic groups. The music and festival practices that I will discuss below emerge from the social lives of members of three of these groups.

First, the Maroons of Accompong Town, or “Leeward Maroons”: a group that has enjoyed semi-autonomous political status in the rugged *cock-pit* country of Jamaica’s western highlands for more than 250 years. Their ancestors rebelled against slavery and won their independence on the battlefield. Second are the practitioners of the religion known as *Kumina*, who refer to themselves, collectively, as the *Bongo Nation*. They claim descent from a group of people from the Congo area, who were liberated from illegal slave traders by the British Navy sometime in the 1850’s. Left stranded on the remote South Atlantic island of St. Helena, they signed up for indentured labor on the then labor-hungry plantations of post-emancipation Jamaica, eventually settling in the eastern parish of St. Thomas. Third are the “family” of Rastafarians who call themselves the *Ion Ites*. They are distinct from the mainstream of Jamaican Rastafarianism in ideology and practice: they adhere to more stringent rules of conduct, diet, speech, and dress, as well as maintaining a stridently poetic political activism. While all of these groups can be said to cluster around the “Afro-creole” end of the cultural continuum of Jamaican society, they each possess and express distinct beliefs, practices and histories. Further, the members of each group have their own motivations for cooperating with each other across group boundaries. In this thesis, I will focus on the ways that these three groups relate to each other and to various other groups (international tourists, Jamaican outsiders, scholars, the government), and the ways that those relationships both inform and emerge from musical performances at festival events.

Performance and Identity in Jamaica

In Jamaica, we will see that cultural identity exists more as a dynamic, discursive *process*, than as a state. Between political, religious, stylistic, and otherwise ideologically charged “zones,” across a continuum of language and performance practices, groups of Jamaicans construct and contest their collective identities. I borrow the concept of “zones”

to describe cultural affinities of individuals and groups across a “continuum of creolization” from Richard Burton (1997:6), which he drew from linguistic studies of the Caribbean. The “zones” have spatial dimensions, but are not strictly spatial. Some groups, like the Ion Ites, maintain strong identification despite being dispersed across the island living side by side with other Jamaicans. The Accompong Maroons, on the other hand, are concentrated in a small area. The *Bongo Nation*, while maintaining strong ties to the eastern St. Thomas Parish, are dispersed into the two main urban areas, Kingston and Montego Bay. In Jamaican society in general the spatial aspect of the “zones” is secondary to the internal “continuum”: individuals make use of fluency across this “continuum” from the African-derived (“basilectal”) extreme to the European-derived (“acrolectal”) extreme (Alleyne 1985:167).

Jamaicans tailor their linguistic behavior to fit any given situation, shifting across the continuum as desired or needed in any situation. In the performance of secular and sacred music, Jamaicans also draw from a continuum of repertoires and styles to establish group or individual identity. Kenneth Bilby (1985:184,187) explicitly uses a musical-stylistic continuum, analogous to the continuum of linguistic difference within creole languages, to describe the diverse musical practices of Jamaicans; “Jamaica displays a rich variety of musical traditions clustering around the African end of the stylistic continuum.” To one extent or another, all of the groups featured in this study position themselves at the African-derived end of the continuum, each staking their own claims to authenticity as “African,” yet also drawing creatively and selectively, on other modes of performance.

The performance sites I accessed during the summer of 2002 (such as the rural dance hall, the Maroon drum builder’s yard, the Maroon Heritage Festival, the *Nyabingi tabernacle*, and the Supper of Rastafari), emerge as sites of intersection and overlap of adjacent “zones” within the “continuum of creolization” described by Burton (1997) in his discussion of the

cultural history of Jamaica. The staging of music in the everyday of Jamaican lives is informed by a history of festival and religious performances, and continuities in style, format, approach, and social significance flow from roots in Africa through the lives of Jamaicans, most of whom were enslaved for much of their history as a nation. I agree with his assertion that early in Jamaican history, culture change involved:

Cultural loss, cultural retention and reinterpretation, cultural imitation and borrowing, and cultural creation. *All* these processes must be given their proper place and weight if the full complexity of culture making if the Caribbean is to be understood. It seems to me *both* “continuity” and “creativity” are involved in creolization, which I see as taking place at least as much *within* the slave community as between that community and the Whites. What progressively emerged...was a continuum of overlapping and competing cultural forms, all of them creole or creolized. (1997:5-6)

While Burton is describing the pre-emancipation period, his characterization of Jamaican culture is also valid for post-emancipation Jamaica, with some critical qualifications. The descendants of the group Burton is talking about, the community of former slaves who had never been Maroons, form the core majority of the contemporary Jamaican population. After emancipation (1835) that group found themselves living alongside several groups of voluntary émigrés from Africa (Alleyne 1988: 43, 90-94) as well as the Maroons, who had been free (and therefore relatively isolated from the enslaved population, including new arrivals from Africa) for more than a century at the time slavery was abolished (Kopytoff 1976: 33). Here the particular culture-history of the Jamaican people reveals some of the seeds of the broad heterogeneity and contested nature of Jamaican identities and landscape. The overlapping zones in Burton’s analysis of pre-emancipation creolization of Jamaican religious and secular musics is still a valid description of Jamaican music, and Jamaican people still actively negotiate and reinterpret group identities in a process involving ideological positioning as well as a desire for poetic satisfaction.

Within this continuum of musical traditions, with performers interacting within and between those zones, forming alliances and oppositions, I seek to understand the processes at and across the “borderlands” (Cooper 1995:x): areas of constant flux due not only to contestation but also due to creativity, alliances, and individuals with dual or multiple identifications. Carolyn Cooper’s useful metaphor comes from her analysis of Jamaican *dancehall* culture, where “border-clashes” (Cooper’s term) are literally contestations between rival discourses: rival local groups vie to define the style and the sound that will dominate the *dancehall* space during special events known as *sound-system clashes*. While the “zones” and “borders” have a spatial component, but are not strictly spatial: in a broader sense they are metaphors for a stylistic and verbal contestation between individuals and among groups as they collaborate and struggle to define public places and group identities. Cooper, of course, is not the first or the only scholar to point out the crucial importance of boundaries of all kinds (social, political, linguistic, etc.) to understanding the process of culture: she is in the company of scholars like Victor Turner, and Renato Rosaldo. Turner, especially, popularized the idea that “liminality” (from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold) is critical to the meaning of any cultural performance (Turner 1986: 177). For him, threshold-crossing represented a much broader theme than the sense in which I use the term “border-clash.” Turner’s *limen* became a basic trope in his approach to modeling the structures of meaning used by any one group.

Another exciting mandate to investigate the borders, the thresholds, and the margins, comes from Rosaldo, who, instead of focusing on the ritual and the ceremonial, turns that interest toward the “everyday” life:

“More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are criss-crossed by border zones, pockets, and eruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste. Along

with “our” supposedly transparent cultural selves, such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation.”

(Renato Rosaldo 1989: 209)

Today Jamaicans produce their cultural performances, against the political backdrop of a structurally adjusted, developing economy, and a post-colonial nationalism. In a recent article, Deborah Thomas (2002a) describes the role of Jamaica’s National Dance Theater Company (NDTC) in helping to promote the idea Thomas calls “creole multiracial nationalism” during and since Jamaica’s independence in 1962. This philosophy, put forth by people she describes as “the anti-colonial political and intellectual elite” (514), emerged in opposition to other potential national ideas in pre-independence Jamaica, such as the black-nationalist ideas of Marcus Garvey. In the decades after independence, the NDTC acted from its “privileged position within the nexus of Jamaican nationalist cultural production” (513) to project its vision of Jamaican identity to the wider world as well as to the Jamaican people through concerts, tours, workshops, and folklore festivals.

Thomas related that her informants among younger members of the NDTC today felt they lacked a sense of unity, compared with the social and ideological cohesion that the older cohort possessed, and which seems to be fading as they retire. She cites this trend at the NDTC as representative of larger changes in the Jamaican Government, as more self-identifying “black” Jamaicans take positions of power in the civil service and private sector, and bring their racial sensibilities to bear on the government’s social and cultural policies. In this context of an opposition between a dominant “Jamaican-creole” national identity and an “amplified racialized diasporic consciousness” (533) within lower-class Jamaican culture, the poetic strategies of my Jamaican consultants take on new significance. In particular I see each group I worked with claiming difference, claiming unique heritage, while attempting to

reach out for allies on the basis of African heritage. Thomas sheds further light on the development of the opposition between Blackness and the “Out of Many, One People” post-colonial creole identity in her discussion (2002b) of the “radical consumerism and ghetto feminism” (37, 43) implicit in conceptions of Blackness current among poor Kingstonians.

I began this project intending to concentrate on the *dancehall* as site of contestation of identities through the deployment of styles, postures, verbal discourses and musical performances. However, I found the musical landscape of Jamaica so diverse in terms of musical genres, performance situations, and expressive identities that I realized I needed to take a broader look at grass-roots musical activity among Jamaicans. Thus I began looking at *Nyabingi* (a Rastafarian ritual complex), *Kumina*, and Gumbay drumming (practiced by the Maroons of Accompong), with the sense that the same approach I intended to use in the *dancehall* might lead to productive interactions with people participating in other musical forms. I sought out people involved in local music and cultural performances, and with them I conducted interviews and recorded sound and images from public performances, while also keeping ethnographic field notes. I spent about ten weeks in Jamaica while working on this project, in June-July 2002, and January 2003. The January trip was made possible thanks to a grant from the Robert C. West research fund in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at LSU.

George Huggins, the *Gumbay* Drum, and the Maroon Heritage Festival

While in the field I broadened the scope of this study due to opportunities that materialized. While assisting my partner, Mandy G. Dickerson, who was doing her own fieldwork in Accompong Town, I met George Huggins, the official gumbay drum builder

for the village. My association with him led to fieldwork opportunity in Accompong Town, and has led me to an interest in Maroon drumming.

In Bilby's video, "Moore Town: Capital of Earth" (1975) the Maroons of Moore Town in the mountains of eastern Jamaica play a cylindrical drum, about 8 inches in diameter, with the head tensioned by cords and wedges, and called it a *kromanti*, or *prenting* drum. The drum pictured there was definitely not the square-framed *gumbay* drum of the Accompong Town Maroons in the West, which I studied with the help of Huggins during my fieldwork there. In his later paper (Bilby 1985:187) "The Caribbean as a Musical Region," he again refers to the *Kromanti play* and the set of two cylindrical drums that accompany it. The disposition of these drums and drumming practices relative to each other and to various, non-maroon, influences became the primary research concern of my fieldwork at the Maroon Heritage Festival in Accompong Town in January 2003. My observations there indicated that maroons in each community use their own locally distinct sets of drums in similar music and ritual that people in both communities label as the *Kromanti play* or *Kromanti dance*.

The January 6th festival in Accompong Town is an important reunion of Maroons from other settlements as well as from abroad and is intended to communicate with, appease, and renew connections to the ancestors, especially Kojo and other local heroes of the wars with the British (Zips 1999:197-202). However, the festival incorporates many other aspects of Jamaican religion and music that are not specifically associated with the Maroons of Accompong, such as *Kumina*, *Dancehall/Reggae* (Stolzoff 2000:xix-xx), and the *Nyabingi* practice of Rastafarians. Further complicating the scene, the Jamaican government has recently renewed efforts to market the festival as a tourism product, attracting large numbers of non-Jamaican spectators to experience the celebration (Jamaica Observer 2001),

which has and will likely continue to transform the nature of this event. Chapter 2 grew out of conversations with Mr. Huggins about the gumbay drum he builds, and my fieldwork at the festival in which that drum plays a central role.

Iunty I Ion, *Roots Dancehall*, *Nyabingi*, and the Supper of Rastafari

One of my initial consultants on *dancehall* in St Elizabeth Parish, a DJ (vocalist) named Iunty I Ion, is also a devout Rastafarian. While working with Iunty we attended *dancehall* events and collaborated on recording sessions. He contributed greatly to this project by inviting me to two significant events that introduced me to many subsequent participants in the study.

First, he brought me to a *Nyabingi*, or *grounation*, a sacred gathering of Rastafarians. This particular event was the annual celebration of Haile Selassie I's birthday, held at the *tabernacle* or temple near the town of Scots Pass, in Manchester Parish. Later, he brought me to a secular festival organized by his sect of Rastas, known as the Ion-Ites. The Festival was the 2nd annual "Supper of Rastafari" and was held outdoors in downtown Montego Bay. This event was dedicated to promoting healthy living, and featured *Ital* foods, non-profit and government social welfare organizations distributing information on nutrition and health, and a non-stop musical stage show featuring many local celebrities and other performers in a variety of different genres, including plainspoken oration, a capella chanting, reggae, *dancehall*, *Nyabingi* drumming and *Kumina* drumming.

Iunty's colleagues Ion Flames Lightning and I-Stan Ion acted as leaders for this event, and exercised executive control over the production by controlling access to the stage and also providing commentary, reinforcing the event's themes through their monologues and chants. Within their normative moral/performative framework, they allowed no expressions of *slackness*, or loose morals, and no theological arguments. The friendly,

“family” atmosphere they attempted to create became a site of negotiation and compromise, where some performers modified their usual performances in order to enact a kind of solidarity with the hosts of the event. Embedded in this discursive process of domination, accommodation, and consensus building, is an echo of the emergent moral authority held by Rastafarianism in contemporary Jamaican popular culture. The Ion Ites allowed me to make a sound recording of the event, and texts from their performances will help me talk about the poetics of Rastafarians’ performances at the *Nyabingi*, in the *dancehall*, and even in a kind of folklore festival/variety show.

A group of *Kumina* performers called the “New Creators,” appeared at the Supper of Rastafari, delivering two performances during the festival. They participated in this framework, modifying their performance, or rather, creating a performance that might be different from what has been described as normal in *Kumina* (Lewin 2000:253, Braun 1995). For the strict and somewhat moralistic Ion Ites Rastas, *Kumina* presents a problematic ritual frame. *Kumina* rituals sometimes include the sacrificial killing of a goat or chicken, and feature the occurrence of the *myal* possession trance in some of the participants (Brathwaite 1978); both killing animals and *myalistic* possession are anathema to Rastafarians (Chevannes 1994:17-22). Somehow the Ion Ites did accommodate the New Creators, who in turn carefully constructed a performance they knew would not offend. More than that, these two groups maintain a working relationship and often collaborate on events such as the one I attended. In daily practice, the perception of common roots and common political perspectives seem to outweigh the ideological discrepancies between the groups, driving a negotiated accommodation of performance format and content. Those discrepancies certainly didn’t seem to trouble the several *Kumina* practitioners with the New Creators who declared they were also Rastafarians.

In chapter 3, I will explore the poetics of the Ion Ite's festival performance relative to the sacred performance of *Nyabingi*, and the rural *roots dancehall* style of Iunty I Ion. Here I discuss the Rastafari movement, as well as provide this study's thickest slice of reflexive description of my life in the field and my personal relationships with the performers who became my key consultants.

Duse Thaxter, *Kumina* and the *Bongo Nation*

The leader of the New Creators, Duse Thaxter, became my consultant on the subject of *Kumina*. He is a Maroon from Nanny Town in the east, and he now lives in St. James Parish, near Montego Bay. In his youth he got involved in *Kumina*, Maroon drumming, and performing reggae music. Long after converting to Rastafari, he renewed his participation in *Kumina*, later coming into his own as a leader and healer among a group of *Kumina* practitioners.

Duse's help toward understanding the nature of *Kumina* was invaluable to me during the summer of 2002 and in the next stage of fieldwork, centered around the Maroon Day festival in Accompong Town, when Duse and I traveled together to that remote village. Though he is an outsider in Accompong, he is well known there, and travels there regularly on invitation to perform *Kumina* during festival times. A regular component of those festivities include outsider groups (groups not explicitly associated with Maroon enclaves) creating performances in honor of the Maroons and their ancestors. This festival is a site of active negotiation and enactment of Maroon identities and histories, within a complex maze of insider/outsider-ness, acted out under the scrutiny of the press as well as a government tourist agency that is eager to transform the village into a commodified tourism destination.

Jamaica's national folklore festivals also feature *Kumina* performances, and *Kumina* has long been incorporated into performances of the National Theatre Dance Company

(Thomas 2002). Imogene “Queenie” Kennedy, a *Kumina* leader, has collaborated with many scholars (Warner-Lewis 1977, Brathwaite 1978) and provided the basis for a long section of Olive Lewin’s (2000:215-303) book detailing her thirty years of participation in folklore research and performance. Queenie Kennedy, who is from a town called Dalvey, presents a marked contrast to Duse, as a *Kumina* leader. Duse grew up in a different generation, and in a different town: Bath, in St. Thomas Parish. While Kennedy’s pioneering work has dominated scholarship about *Kumina* in the past, I hope my engagement with Duse reveals a different point of view within the tradition.

Using conversations with Duse about *Kumina*, the live recordings of *Kumina* performed at the Supper of Rastafari and at his home in the settlement of Guava Walk, near Montego Bay, I explore the *Bongo Nation* in Chapter Four. Two theses by student scholars detailing original research on *Kumina* further enrich my analysis of Duse’s performance style. I draw on Mark Braun’s (1995) MA thesis on the music and drumming of the *Kumina* in Duckenfield, St. Thomas, a study in which Duse himself participated, and another MA thesis, Susan Kelly Moore’s (1988) discourse analysis of *country Kumina* songs collected by her grandfather, Joseph G. Moore, in St. Thomas Parish in the 1950’s.

Further Issues

In any anthropological discussion of the African Diaspora, the polemic between Herskovitz and Frazier invariably comes up. The argument is over the origins of African American culture and language. Frazier hypothesized that the experience of capture, transportation, and indoctrination as slaves imposed total erasure of African identity, culture, and language. Therefore origin of African American culture lies in mimicry of European American culture. Herskovitz, at the other pole of the argument, looked for and found a host of African cultural survivals, and emphasized the richness and importance of African

heritage in African American lives. Today the issue has evolved into a debate over the *relative* importance of continuity and creativity in the roots of Jamaican culture (Yelvington 1994:303). Sydney Mintz and Richard Price (1976) helped to bring this shift into the discourse of cultural anthropology, attempting to transcend the polemic by accounting for the particular cultural identities of African transportees and the locally diverse situations their offspring had to adapt to. Though Mintz and Price acknowledge the social disarticulation that must have characterized the “crowds” (9) of recently enslaved Africans as they were assimilated into slave societies, their use of the concept of underlying African “grammatical principles and cognitive orientations” (5) upon which Caribbean slaves built their identities has been recognized as distinctively Herskovitsean (Burton 1997:6). In *Afro-Creole*, Burton agrees; he supports the idea that culture formation in the Caribbean has neither been the product of stubborn retention, nor the effect of brutal erasure. Both factors do apply. However, each takes a secondary role relative to the creative recombination and redeployment of group and individual identities in pursuit of political, social, and poetic satisfaction.

Sight up as an example the *Nyabingi* drumming tradition in Rastafari. Before the 1950’s Rastafarian religious music ensembles included calypso/mento instrumentation, such as rhumba box, guitar, and saxophone. While doing fieldwork among Rastafarians in 1953, George E. Simpson (1998), recorded religious practices which lacked several features that would later become ubiquitous: in those yards at that time, there were very few brethren wearing dread-locks, there was no sign of ganja use, and the *Nyabingi* drums had not been adopted. From the movement’s origins decades earlier until just a few years after Simpson’s 1953 encounters, Rastafari had been dominated by a group that today identify themselves as *combsome*, and their mode of worship was more like Revivalism than today’s *Nyabingi* services.

A group within the movement, known as the “Youth Black Faith,” rose to prominence on a wave of reforms in the mid 1950’s, and seems to have brought these practices, wearing locks, smoking ganja, chanting *Nyabingi*, into the core of the movement in a bid to purge from their religious practice any similarities to *myalistic* Afro-Christian sects *Revivalism* and *Pukumina* (Chevannes 1994:154-170).

A member of the youth Black Faith named Count Ossie, who also had a background as a participant in *Kumina*, *Burru* drumming, and *Pukumina*, is said to have been one of the pioneers in the creation of *Nyabingi*, then a newly emerging ritual-drumming genre (Reckord 1998). Ossie and his group, the Sons of Negus, sat in on John Folkes recording of the song “Oh, Carolina” in 1959, which became a nationwide smash hit. The instrumentation of *Nyabingi*, and the sound of its distinctive rhythm, became well known and associated with Rastafarian religion. But the drumming style may have emerged from a distinctive urban form of *Kumina* practice in the ghettos of Kingston.

A 1953 photo by Simpson appears in Kenneth Bilby’s chapter on Jamaica in Peter Manuel’s book *Caribbean Currents* (1995:162). The photo pictures three “*Kumina*” drummers from Kingston. The instruments they are holding are not those of the *Kumina* performers of rural St. Thomas Parish; the drums associated with the *Kumina* of “Queenie” Kennedy (Braithwaite 1978), with the Duckenfield group studied by Mark Braun (1995), and those used by my consultant Duse Thaxter. The drummers in Simpson’s photo hold instruments that would be recognized today as the *Nyabingi* orchestra: three drums – bass drum, *funde*, and *kete*. The musicians sit in chairs and play the *funde* and *kete* with only their hands, instead of sitting *on* the drums, playing with both hands and one foot, like the drummers of country *Kumina*. According to Bilby, the urban *Kumina* practitioners adopted their instruments from another drumming genre/ritual practice known as *Burru*, a style of drumming associated with

Jonkonnu celebrations in the Parishes of Clarendon and St. Catherine (see also Lewin 2000:122-3).

The name “Nyabingi” came from the name of a secret society in Uganda in the early 20th century (Turner and Ferguson 1994:22). This society was dedicated to decolonization; the name means “death to the oppressor.” Early 20th century Jamaican Garvey-ites and Ethiopianists cultivated a pan-African historical awareness, and the Jamaican press often carried stories about the insurgency against the British in East Africa. When in the mid-1950’s, young Rastafarians like Count Ossie and his brethren brought forth their drums and applied them to a revitalization of Rastafarian music and ritual, they dubbed it *Nyabingi* (Chevannes 1994:43, 164). Through the 1960’s and 1970’s the *Nyabingi* drum rhythms, along with other co-evolving features of Rastafarian worship such as the *tabernacle* construction, and multi-day extended *reasoning* sessions, all were institutionalized under that name. Today, the *Nyabingi* drum rhythms and the *Nyabingi* worship complex have become a nearly standardized ritual in Rastafarian communities worldwide and in Jamaica itself.

The *Nyabingi* ritual complex is not derived from any single African antecedent tradition, but is a creative response to the ideological need for a connection to Africa in the musical ritual of worship in Rastafarianism. It draws from local musical traditions rooted in African Heritage, re-combined into a practice that is at once both ancient and new, both purely African and creatively Jamaican. Thus *Nyabingi* drumming exists simultaneously a “mystic revelation” of an ancient secret, and an emergent product of processes of creolization involving several local religious and secular musical traditions.

The idea of cultural creolization grows at least partly out of the linguistic study of Caribbean languages as creole languages; that is, as hybridized re-combinations of the languages of the colonizing Europeans and transported Africans. In the debate over the

details of exactly how that process happened and continues to shape emerging language change, the most vitriolic echoes of the Herskovits-Frazier debate resonate. This field is characterized on one extreme by activistic programs to decolonize the representation of creole languages by making spelling more phonetic, thereby breaking with the orthography of the colonial master's language (Adams 1991). On the other end of the spectrum, some like Jean Metellus (1998), resort to reductionistic and dehumanizing remarks about the possible contributions of Africans and Native Americans to the evolution of modern creole languages, in an attempt to valorize a Euro-centric model of Caribbean ethnogenesis.

Metellus asserts that African slaves in Haiti could not possibly have collaborated with each other, and that Haitian creole was imposed "from the top down." Haitian Creole, in his speculation, was and is limited to basic commands and orders, to which he snidely attaches the corollary that Haitians who speak only creole are cognitively excluded from poetic or theoretical scientific thought. Metellus claims that rural dialects of Norman French, that are now extinct in France, formed a greater part of the early creole of Haiti than any African language could have. His argument is pure racist venom, but he may inadvertently have pointed to something important: the role of social segregation in the early development of Caribbean creole societies. Linguistic creativity and re-combination must have occurred out of necessity in social situations of daily contact and communication. But since daily life included little discourse between slaves the plantation owner, and since discourse with overseers was probably focused on work and domination, the proper French of the plantation owners may have had little opportunity to influence the language spoken by the enslaved workers.

For the same reason, Burton (1997) argues that the creolization of "Jamaican" identity took place far more among ethnically different slaves than between those slaves and

their masters as social groups. In this model, the most marked contribution from European language and culture must have been not from the masters, who in Jamaica were aloof if not absent, but from the overseers, who were often from lower classes, marginalized ethnic groups (such as the Welsh and Scottish), or from free colored classes, such as the “Creolians” imported from Barbados and used to “season” new slaves in early Jamaican slavery (Burton 1997:17). While Metellus argues that the presence of linguistic ties between Haitian Creole and old Norman dialects asserts the primacy of proper French in Haitian plantation life, I think that his arguments defeat his own thesis, and on this issue may only illustrate the personal and linguistic distance between the “high” European slave-master and the “low” language spoken by the oppressed workers in both Haiti and Jamaica. In the linguistic and historical emergence of Jamaican Creole, or “Patois”, the distinctly outsider status of the “proper English” end of the continuum is a reflection of that distance between the elite plantation owners and the enslaved Africans and Afro-Jamaicans.

The situation described by Douglas Hall (1989) in his book on the diary of an 18th century Englishman, Thomas Thistlewood, who emigrated to Jamaica in 1748 and eventually earned enough as a slave overseer to own his own plantation, is revealing on the last point: On most of the plantations he describes, the “Massa” is nowhere around, living either in town or back in England. The linguistic environment of the slaves in the places Thistlewood describes was surely one of domination, but the overseers enforcing that regime were more likely to speak lower-class English, Welsh, Gaelic, or the Barbadian-English creole spoken by mulattos and free Blacks (Burton 1997:15-17). In such speech communities, interaction with overseers might have been alternately brutal or focused on work, but among the enslaved people themselves, language, play, and song flourished during times of socializing with co-enslaved and kin. The creole “English” of Jamaica emerged primarily from the context of

interactions among the enslaved people, inspired by their need to create and maintain social bonds. Metellus' implication that Caribbean creole languages are somehow half-languages is repulsive and false, especially considering the rich traditions of both oral and written literature, poetry, performance and folklore owned by the creole peoples he seeks to discount.

Beyond writings *about* Jamaican language and culture, the texts of the interviews and performances I recorded during my fieldwork are the best access I have to the language spoken by my consultants. But how do I represent that speech as text, and do justice to the language? I use the spelling and orthography suggested by L. Emilie Adams (1991:6-12) in order to inscribe as true a representation of the speech as possible. In my discussion of my field experiences, I will turn to these texts as expressions of cultural identity of the various Jamaicans who participated in this study. Adams advances a system of representing the speech of Jamaicans that addresses a dilemma I consider crucial to the issue: the difficulty lies not in representing the words that are unique to Jamaican creole, but with representing the words that do have direct cognates in standard English. A directly phonetic transcription would render the text illegible to most non-linguists, while the orthography of "standard" English spellings could never come close to representing Jamaican speech as text. Her solution is to transcribe some of the speech she recorded twice, printing two transcriptions of the same text side by side in two columns, one column using a directly phonetic method and the other using a compromise using phonetic spelling for unique vocabulary and traditional or modified spelling for cognates. For my purposes as an ethnographer, not a linguist, I will use Adam's "A version," the compromise version that attempts to represent distinct features of the dialect, while still accessible to those not either fluent in it or adept at reading phonetic transcription. My consultants generally chose to

speak to me in a dialect very close to standard English, yet often used patois phrases for emphasis or effect, so I chose Adams' scheme of representation because it allowed me enough flexibility to approximate the idiomatic shifts in their speech.

The discourse on Caribbean creolization is also bearing fruit in disciplines outside of linguistic and cultural anthropology, and outside of the Caribbean region. A recent article in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, by British archaeologist Jane Webster (2001), uses theories of culture change derived from studies of Caribbean creolization, and applies them to the historical archaeology of Roman era Britain. She uses the idea of creolization in her interpretation of Roman style tile mosaics that appear to contain pre-Roman iconographic elements associated with local folk culture. In the work of Caribbean historical archaeologists, iconographic evidence like those decorative mosaics is tantalizingly rare, however, the social and material cultural context of emerging creole Caribbean peoples can best be read from land use practices and everyday personal items.

Though the entire Caribbean region can be characterized as having a history of slavery, it is important to note the large variety of social and environmental conditions under which transported Africans came to live, resulting in different settlement patterns and access to goods. Any discussion of Afro-Jamaican archaeological sites must include issues such as the history of Maroonage in the island's rugged interior (Agorsah 1994:164-170), the relative autonomy afforded slave communities in planting their own provision grounds (Mintz 1985:134), absentee plantation ownership (Brathwaite 1971:86-92), and the post-emancipation exodus of Afro-Jamaicans off of the plantations. At that time, mid 19th century, many new settlements sprang up in the hinterland, some of them carefully planned "Church-founded free villages" (Mintz 1958). This social-historical complexity of land use

patterns combines with a great variety of ecological and climatic conditions to create the Jamaican landscape.

Near my field site in Accompong, E. Kofi Agorsah (1994:181-183; 1999:47-51) performed surface collections, surveying, and a limited excavation. The original site of Accompong Town was about a kilometer northeast of the middle of the present day settlement. Today this area is called “Old Town”: this is the location of Kojo’s grave, where some of the rituals take place on festival day. On that day, the area is off-limits to outsiders, and though non-maroons are allowed in the area at other times, I found that the locals express a kind of reverence for this place and for other sites in their landscape. Significantly, Aborsah’s excavation in this semi-sacred area, near the site of Kojo’s grave, turned up musket balls, locally made earthen-wares, and even several cowrie shells of possible West African provenience. Other ceramics, buttons, and green-glass bottles led Aborsah to confirm the site had been occupied in the late 17th or early 18th century. But when and why did the settlement move? In my treatment of Accompong town and other field sites, I’ll seek to relate my field experience there to historical, geographical, and material cultural issues in Jamaica’s past.

A lively and heated debate exists over the nature of trance and possession, with implications in all of the performances I discuss in the following chapters. One issue in the literature is determining the relative importance of neurophysiology and cultural patterning in creating the trance. Another issue is whether there is a *universal* physiological basis for the phenomenon, or are there actually many different distinct types of altered mental states? The general consensus on cross-cultural trance phenomena is that they can be roughly divided into shamanistic and mediumistic types (Harrington 2000). Primarily, the difference is that mediumistic trances involve loss of bodily control and awareness; the practitioner is

literally *possessed* and later has amnesia about the event. In shamanistic trances the practitioner usually retains control of his or her body, and remembers the experience. The latter type seems focused on healing and divination *by* the entranced person, while the former on catharsis and healing *of* the entranced.

Each of these types of trances emerged in performances I witnessed in Jamaica. *Kumina* shares the possession-trance known as *myal* with many other religious practices in Jamaica, including the Maroon Kromanti drumming, Revivalism, Convince, and Zion. In *myal*, as in the possession-trances of Haitian Vodun practitioners, spirits are said to enter the entranced person's body and "ride" them. The entranced may dance, sing, or speak as the possessing spirit, or alternately convulse and collapse.

The *Nyabingi* drumming practice of the Rastafarians may have been partially derived from *Kumina*. Remarkably, though the Rastas do practice a sort of trance within their ritual frame, it is *very* different from the *myal* possession-trance, which they shun. Rastas use the *Nyabingi* rhythms, chanting, dance, smoking ganja, and sometimes fasting to produce a meditative state they call *Iditation*. This state seems to fit better with shamanistic trance than mediumistic trance, as the Rastas never lose control of their bodies or their minds, and pursue this practice with an intensely lucid and reserved attitude. Consistent with "shamanic" trance, *Nyabingi* evokes extraordinary poetic and musical performances from the participants: the expressed purpose of the practice is to "chant down Babylon," in an attempt to heal the world.

In the three chapters that follow I build an ethnographic account of several different but related secular and religious musical traditions in Jamaica. I have enlisted the help of three consultants whose fluency within and across those traditions enables them to help me understand the tensions and harmonies between the cultural identities those musical

traditions represent. In telling this story through narratives of my field experience, I will use their words from ethnographic interviews, the texts and styles of their musics, and their traditions, in relation to Jamaican society and history, as I seek to understand the pattern and meaning in the way these performers construct and position their musical, stylistic, poetic identities.

CHAPTER TWO

RESISTANCE, FESTIVAL, AND SECRECY: GEORGE HUGGINS AND THE MAROONS OF ACCOMPONG TOWN

You won't find Accompong Town on most maps of Jamaica (see Figure 2.1). Deep in the "*cock-pit* country" of the island's western-central highlands, the village sprawls along a branching ridge that is the high ground between five or six of the pits that give the region its name. The *cock-pits* themselves are steep conical depressions whose floors are cluttered with boulders and concealed cave entrances;

"Cockpit Karst comprises steep sided, enclosed depressions with convex inwards side slopes, forming depressions which are star shaped or polygonal in plan. The depressions have a concave floor covered with a variable amount of rubble and soil, and intervening conical hills. The cockpits tend to be contiguous with an identifiable divide between each depression..."(Barker and Miller 1995:274)

The form of the land results from the combination of true rain forest precipitation levels and relatively level limestone substrata, a lot of water for an area with almost no visible surface runoff; rain that falls on the *cock-pits* feeds the springs and blue holes at the sources of several major rivers (275).

During the 1730's, these rugged lands were the scene of an epic struggle that resonates to the heart of Jamaican cultural poetics, an episode known as the First Maroon War. The British had routed the Spanish out of Jamaica by 1655, but pockets of resistance remained, reinforced by ongoing rebellions and escapes by slaves of the British. Between 1660 and 1690 a coalition of self-liberated Africans established a presence in the *cock-pit* country, undermining British attempts to expand sugar plantations in the area by periodically attacking homesteads and freeing slaves. In response to a series of costly losses in 1738, the British negotiated a treaty with the Leeward Maroon leader Kojo. The deal was a victory for the Maroons, gaining them rights to their lives and even their land, but it was also a victory

for the British slave-plantation society in Jamaica, as it opened a period of optimism and expansion. Accounts written by one colonist in the 1750's depict Kojo and his Captains Accompong and Qaco as responsible authorities, remarkable because nowhere else in the "New World" had Africans achieved this degree of autonomy. (Hall 1989:55) Today in Accompong, Kojo is a national hero, an ancestral King, and the authority of the Colonel derives not from Jamaica's independence from Britain in 1968, but from Kojo's blood signature on the treaty of 1738.

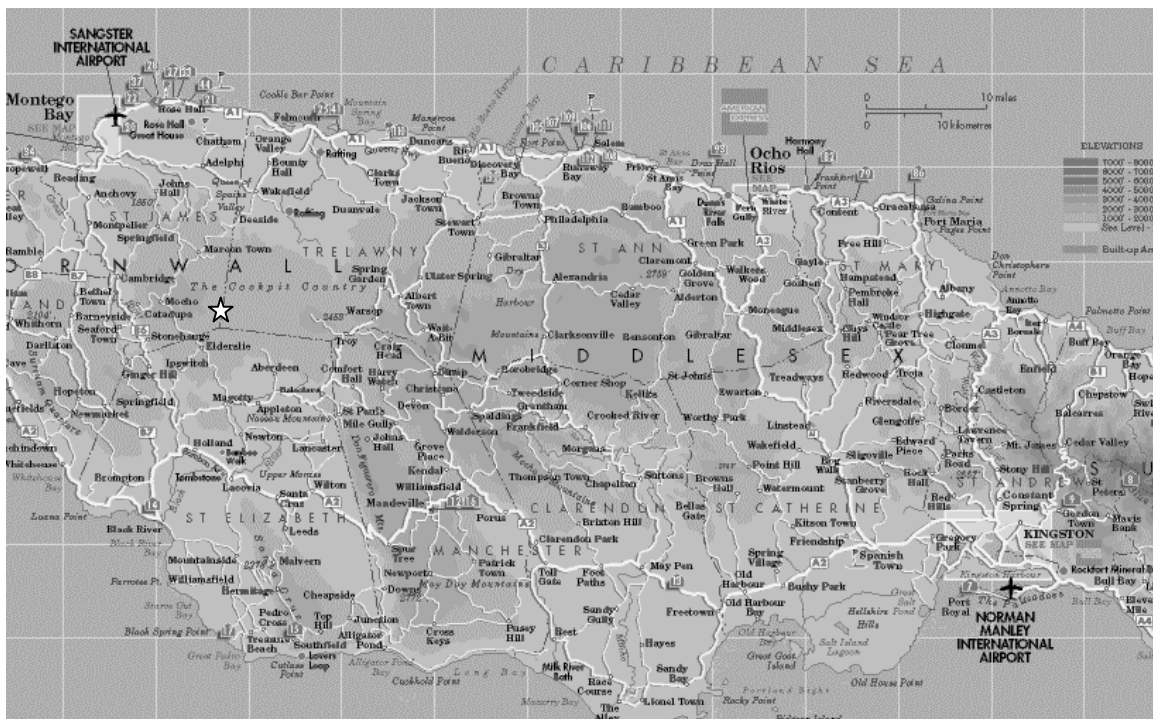


FIGURE 2.1: I added a star on this map at the approximate location of Accompong Town, the original map shows no roads or settlements in the area (Caribbean-On-Line 2004).

Politically the village and the country immediately around it still occupy a special position: by treaty they have rights to some kinds of autonomy. The residents pay no taxes, and for the most part govern themselves without interference from the Jamaican authorities. They have little need for police, except to keep order during the annual festival, and they boast often that there has only been one homicide in the 350-year history of the town. The town is governed by an elected "Colonel," he has final authority over most disputes,

especially those pertaining to land tenure. Land ownership is partially communal, and with it responsibilities for work are also partially shared.

Though historically isolated in many ways (legally, physically, and economically), this enclave has long been the subject of anthropological curiosity (Hurstun 1938), and lately has become a site of interest to tourists and tourism developers as well. The post-colonial (literally speaking) nation state of Jamaica, has plans to make little Accompong a “cultural tourism” destination, while the townspeople and a host of other local and international groups are struggling to define just what that will mean *here*.

The people of Accompong are ethnically distinct among Jamaicans. They call themselves Maroons, meaning that their ancestors revolted against slavery, freed themselves and established communities outside of European colonial slaver societies. People in similar circumstances took similar steps all over the colonial world in response to slavery, but the “Leeward Maroons” of western Jamaica count themselves as unique. While fewer than 1000 people live in the town of Accompong, many thousands of people who claim Leeward Maroon ancestry live in the surrounding region, in the big cities of Jamaica, and abroad in the US, Canada, and Britain. The Leeward Maroons, hailing from in Accompong Town and a few other settlements in the western highlands, consider themselves distinct from the “Windward Maroons” of the East, a more diverse and more populous group (Zips 1999:58). The residents of Accompong also possess unique musical rituals and instruments, and though they had been isolated from other Maroon enclaves in living memory, cultural exchanges in the 1970’s fostered new links among Maroon groups (Lewin 2000:158). Paramount in this new exchange is the exchange of official delegations to festivals, usually featuring bands of drummers and dancers, in addition to the political leaders of each settlement, who are known as “Colonels.”

Maroons in Jamaica

Part of their pride of Maroon heritage is that their ancestors fought to remain free for eighty-three years (from 1655-1738), as Britain struggled to consolidate control of Jamaica. Britain finally sued for peace, sending Colonel John Guthrie to negotiate a treaty with Kojo. The Treaty conceded the Leeward Maroons their freedom and a swath of land that included all of the *cock-pits*. In return, the Maroons had to accept an English representative among them, allow the construction of a road into the area, and raise a militia at the service of the King, for the purpose of putting down other slave uprisings and attempts at maroonage. Ironically, their victory, and the ensuing peace, paved the way for a massive expansion of the sugar plantation economy, and therefore spurred a boom in the slave trade. Nevertheless, this was the beginning of a rising tide of resistance around the Caribbean that would eventually make the slavery system unsustainable. Sixty years after Kojo signed the 1738 treaty, Haiti would be free, and only one hundred years later (1835) slavery would be dead in Jamaica, despite the fact that Maroons, treaty-bound, fought alongside the British to crush the frequent slave rebellions during those last hundred years of slavery in Jamaica. Nevertheless, the Maroons of Jamaica initiated a pattern of insurgency against slavery in which resistant groups drew on African-derived “cultural-capital” for political organization (e.g. secret societies) and military tactics (e.g. ambush camouflage).

It is no surprise that Jamaicans in general have mixed feelings about Maroons. After Jamaica’s independence from Britain in 1968, the new nation officially declared both Kojo and his Windward Maroon counterpart, Nanny, to be National Heroes, and today Nanny’s stern countenance graces the Jamaican \$500 note (worth about \$10 US in Jan. 2003). Still, Jamaicans are aware of the contradictory historical roles played by the Maroons, and one of

my consultants referenced that issue to reinforce her personal assessment of the Accompong Maroons.

Shirley Genus of Great Bay (southern St. Elizabeth Parish) has Maroon ancestry but does not claim to be “a Maroon.” She is a healer and has studied a variety of therapeutic approaches, from traditional African-Jamaican practices to modern massage-therapy. She warned us that the Accompong Maroons have powerful knowledge of herbal medicine and magic, but that they are secretive and suspicious of outsiders, and dangerous if angered. She said she would not go there because of an old grudge held against her by a powerful sorcerer. In further support of her assessment of Accompong Maroons, she too referenced historical “betrayals”: that Kojo signed the treaty without consulting his Windward Maroon allies, led by “Grandy Nanny,” and that later they tracked and captured runaway slaves.

Getting There

When Zora Neal Hurston visited Accompong sometime around 1935, it was already known as a resource for scholars of African cultures in diaspora. In her book *Tell My Horse* (1938), she describes her field studies of folklore and everyday life in Accompong Town and other places in Jamaica and Haiti. As Hurston settled in as a guest in the Colonel’s house, “He told me how Dr. Herskovits had been there and passed the night with him; how someone else had spent three weeks to study their dances and how much money they had spent doing this.” (Hurston 1938:22) The student of dance she mentions is probably Katherine Dunham, who published her account, *Journey To Accompong* in 1946.

So, the people of Accompong are used to being seen as special. Scholars and other outsiders seek them out looking for connections to African heritage in the Americas. Further, they are believed to possess indigenous ecological knowledge due to both their 300-

year tenure in this tropical ecosystem and their early contact with now extinct indigenous Taino and Arawak peoples.

For me, as a student of African diaspora cultures and musics, the attraction of Accompong is undeniable. Maroon societies, by nature, attempt to exclude European influences on their expressive culture; when Europeanisms occur they are more or less intentional appropriations. That is not to say Accompong is or was homogenous; the original settlers came from at least three African ethnic groups, making it a site of inter-African creolization. In my mind, it had a legendary, unreal quality about it as I read about the heroic resistance and guerilla tactics of the Maroons. By the time we set out from our temporary home on the coast of southern St. Elizabeth Parish for Accompong Town, my awareness of it was complicated, I was a little anxious, considering the larger historical picture and the experiences related to by Shirley.

On our rented motorbike, we climbed up from the coast, up the valley of the Black River, through towns with names like “Burnt Savannah,” and “Maggotty.” Though the last ten miles of the road was a winding patchwork of bare rock, gravel, tar and pitch, the route was never in doubt, because of the excellent road signs provided by the Jamaican government and the TPDco (Tourism Product Development Company). Few other places in Jamaica enjoy such a presence in roadsigns as does Accompong, only areas slated for tourism development. Nowhere on the island did I see any newer, nicer or larger signs than those indicating the way to Accompong. We chugged and bounced up the mountain to the gates of the Town and on toward the center, found one of precious few nearly level spots and parked the bike. We were practically in the shadow of a seven-foot high sign showing the tour route through the town, mapped out in full color. We happened to have stopped right alongside the museum, and just across the road from the large stone monument to

Kojo. Just as we dismounted, a pleasant but serious looking man appeared from around a corner. He was Sydney, leader of the group of tour guides who work at the museum. He welcomed us to Accompong and chatted with us for a moment before inviting us to take the tour.

We took a tour of the town, guided by Nadine, a young woman in her twenties. She showed us the old church and the graveyard, then walked us up to the “*Kindah* Tree,” where the core of the “Kojo’s Day” celebration takes place. “*Kindah*” means “one family,” according to the sign installed by TPDco next to the site. Placards placed at this and other points of interest throughout the village present details about significant places in the landscape (see FIGURE 2.2). TPDco made the signs and trained a squad of ten or so youths from the town to work as guides, all part of it’s overall mission of helping Accompong develop “sustainable community-based tourism”.

A private company created as a proxy by the national Ministry of Tourism and Sport, TPDco operates island-wide and undertakes to develop and improve the tourism product of Jamaica (http://www.tpdco.org/about_us.asp). The attention from the government has created some unique developments here. For example, in this town of less than 1000, where few people have indoor plumbing, and many locals bathe out of washtubs, there are *four sets* of public restrooms, each with two separate (men’s/women’s) bathrooms with running water and flushing toilets. Using local labor, TPDco also funded construction of the “*Bickle* Village,” a space designed to showcase cultural performances, complete with large covered stage, concession stand, restrooms, rows of bench seating, and also several facsimiles of traditional Maroon “wattle” wall houses for display. At festival time, they even bring in dozens of brightly colored barrels as garbage cans, and position them all around town. They paid for and may have authored some of the texts on the ten or so signs along the tour route

(see Figure 2.2). Since the town's position in the Jamaican political economy is now more and more mediated by representations of Maroon history and identity to tourists, I am tantalized by the question of the authorship and control of those representations.

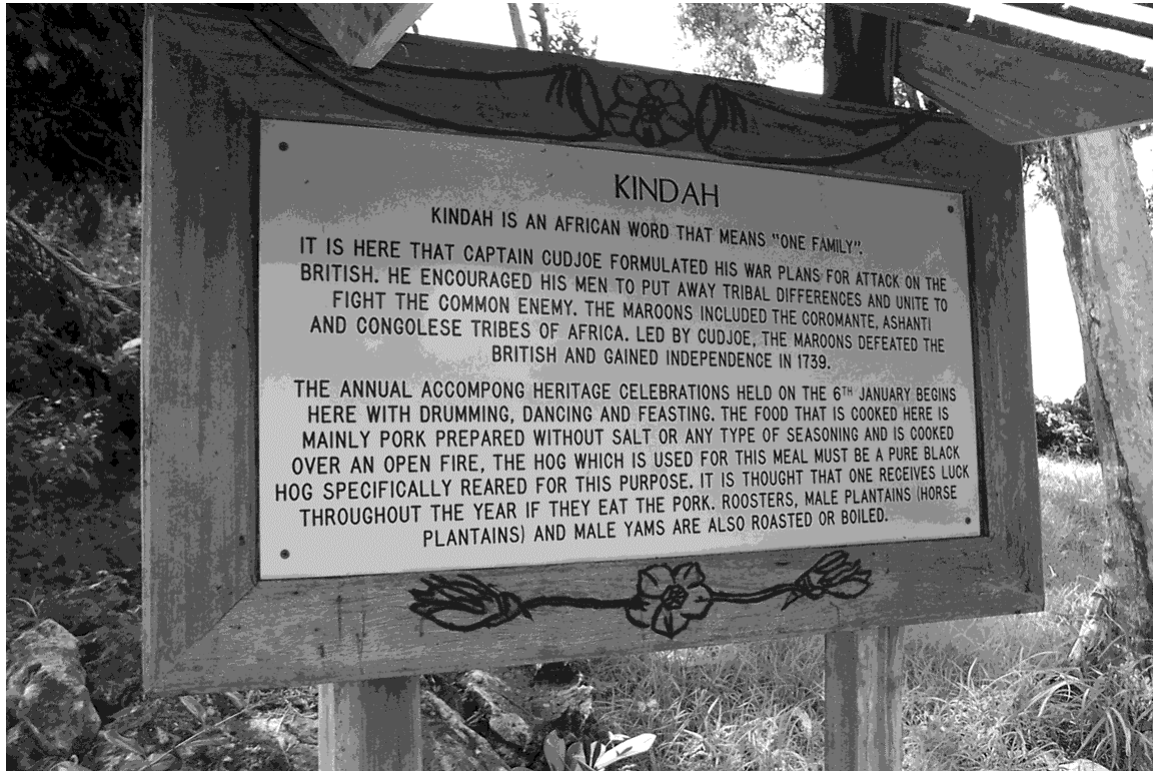


FIGURE 2.2: Tour Route sign near the *Kindah* Tree.

After a moment at *Kindah* (see figure 2.3), and a stop at the “congo” graveyard, Nadine hurried us back to the museum where we viewed the displays. The elements of the museum seemed to emphasize the Muslim heritage of the original Maroons, with displays pointing out Arabic cognates to the names of early leaders. Like the narrative offered by the signs posted along the tour route, the museum spoke with a voice intent on legitimizing the “authenticity” of the African cultures brought here by the first Maroons and passed to their descendants. However, the version of the history presented in the museum contradicts the version presented by the tour route signs.

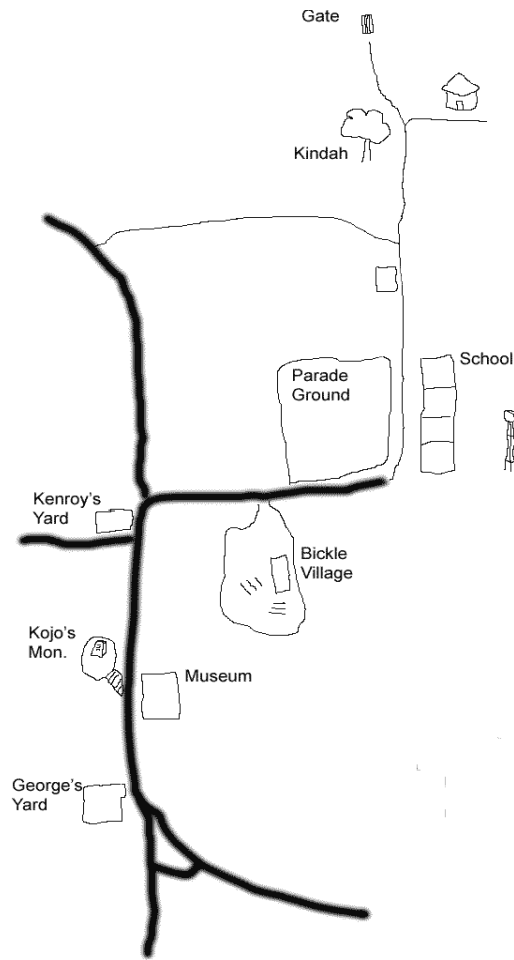


FIGURE 2.3: This drawing reproduces a crude “map” from my field notes, and should give the reader a basic diagram of Accompong’s layout. The thick line is semi-paved, and both of the roads at the bottom, actually continue by different routes out of the village. Beyond the gate at the top lies the abandoned original settlement of Accompong, now known as “Old Town.”

The author(s) of the museum displays seemed to be glossing over complex elements of the story, replacing them with a narrative that is more true of Jamaican Maroons in general than of the people of Accompong Town. In the museum, the history of these particular Maroons as descendants of refugees from English plantations (liberated between 1660 and 1690) and having ethnic origins in several different Islamized nation-states in West Africa, is placed alongside a narrative that claims for Accompong an origin among Moorish Andalusian sailors and vaqueros brought to Jamaica by the Spanish. While such “Spanish Maroons” are known to have occupied a site at the other end of the *cock-pits*, nearly twenty

miles away, their descendants now reside in the Windward Maroon area in the East (Zips 1999, p55). A tour sign on the route claims that the ethnic mix of the Leeward Maroons was “Coromantyne [*Kromanti*], Ashanti, and Congolese,” but doesn’t mention “Spanish” Maroons.

As I browsed in the museum, I encountered a display that made my heart leap with joy and surprise: *the* traditional drum of Accompong, a square-shaped instrument called the “*gumbay*.” I was amazed both at the shape of the instrument, and at my own ignorance of it. I arrived expecting any drums I encountered to resemble the *prenting* drums used by the Windward Maroons of Moore Town, like those pictured in Kenneth Bilby’s (1975) documentary film *Moore Town: Capital of Earth*. I remarked on my amazement over the drum, the museum curator responded, “The man who makes the *gumbay* lives across the street, and he’s always eager to talk to visitors.” I jumped at the opportunity to meet George Huggins. He is a craftsman, a farmer, and also an ambassador of Accompong to the world, hosting important visitors and traveling abroad to represent Leeward Maroon culture. In 1992 he went to Washington D.C. to participate in the Smithsonian Museum’s Festival of American Folklife, which in that year celebrated the legacy of maroonage in the Americas. We chatted for a while before my partner and I began the long downhill ride home. George invited me to come back when I could spend some time, and I promised to return.

Mr. Huggins’ *Gumbay*

In mid-July I traveled again to see George, this time without my partner but with two other American friends in tow. I learned from my previous journey by motorbike that public transportation (“route-taxi”) is available to and from Accompong several times daily, and this time I took that route. George’s yard is near the heart of the modern village, and like many Jamaican yards, serves as an outdoor axis of his household, onto which most

rooms open, through which passes the path to the privy, and within which is staged much of the daily work and play of this large household. The space functions simultaneously as George's drum workshop, his son's barbershop, another son's workshop for basketry, the children's play area, and even a hangout for local youths.

I came to Accompong, to George's yard, to learn about the *gumbay* drum, how and from what materials it is made. From my previous conversations with George I learned that because of division of labor within the village, I would have to consult the official drummer for information on the *use* of the *gumbay*. So with George, I focused on the materials, construction, and lore about the drum. For most of two days, I watched George and talked with him while he built a drum for one of my companions.

A peek inside of his work-shed/chicken coop (also the roof over me and my hammock for the night) revealed a long bench down one side littered with tools and material scraps, backed by a peg-board on which various tools were hung along with several photos of George's family and visitors. From the ceiling rafters hung several green-painted *abengs*. These transverse trumpets are made of cow's horns with the point removed and the interior cavity bored out the end. The player places a thumb on the cavity to change the pitch as he buzzes the note through a square-cut hole in the concave side near the tip. The *abeng* is a uniting symbol among all of Jamaica's Maroons, who universally cite the military role played by this horn and the secret code articulated when playing it, known only to true Maroons, in the successful resistance of Maroons against the British (Zips 1999:83). The *abeng* and its encoded musical language are still used ceremonially and to announce certain events like sickness, death or other emergencies that require rapid response from the whole community (Lewin 2000:158). On the bench, in a box on the table, and in a small hutch, *gumbays* of many different sizes and in various states of completion lay all about.

The “official” *gumbay* has a head about fourteen inches square, stands about sixteen inches high, and is played by a drummer seated on the ground. One experimental form, which George claims as his own innovation, keeps the body of the drum the same, while extending the length of the “legs” of the drum by six to eight inches, making it possible for a drummer to play while seated in a conventional chair. Several other variations are adaptations specific to the tourist trade: both a 3/4 size and a 1/2 size are still playable, while several dozen toy-like *gumbays* only five inches square were being prepared to fill an order from a vendor who operates out of one of the all-inclusive resorts on the North-coast.

George prefers to work outside when he can, using a work-bench under a tarpaulin awning at one end of his yard instead of working in the shed (see Figure 2.4). His tools are the basic, common tools of carpentry, that is, they are the same tools I saw my father use for woodwork when I was a boy. As he began building the drum George used a machete, a planer, a square, a rasp and a hand-saw to fabricate perfect planks, from which to build the drum, out of hand-hewn slabs of local rain-forest hardwoods.

Using hammer, wood chisel, small nails and wood glue he fitted together the nested concentric pair of square frames of the drum’s body. Then he added the complex of legs, braces and wedges that tension the drum before attaching the goat-skin (see Figure 2.5) head with small brass tacks. Smoked, shaved, soaked in water and attached wet, the skin would have to dry overnight before the drum could be tensioned. George chooses from local woods like breadfruit tree, cedar (not North American “cedar”), “golden-spoon,” “shad-bark” and a tree he calls “broadleaf palm,” for the body and legs of his drums. However, in all of the drums he makes for sale, he includes a few pieces of imported commercially bought wood. On this drum he used wood from some pieces of imported pine lumber, scraps of 2x4” and 1x6” that he had in his shed. Using the same approach as with the other

parts of the drum, he planed down these pieces and out of them fabricated one leg and one brace, which he used to finish the *gumbay*.



FIGURE 2.4: George working at his outdoor bench.

Before we set out the next day, George made a point to sign the drum and otherwise inscribe its body with the date, references to Kojo and blessings of “peace” and “love.” He regretted that we hadn’t had the opportunity to have the village drummers play and dance for us, but conceded that the only time we could witness this without commissioning the performance ourselves would be at the annual January 6th “Kojo Day,” or “Maroon Day” festival.

George allowed me to interview him at length about his life history on a third trip to Accompong, in late July 2003. He identifies himself as both a Rastafarian and a Maroon, and seems to have reconciled any contradictions that might imply. He is fully an insider in Accompong though he was not born here. His mother was a daughter of an earlier Colonel

of the town; she left and married an outsider, but later returned with George to Accompong. He told me that when he arrived in town for the first time, the elders recognized his mother, and welcomed him “like a long-lost son.”



FIGURE 2.5: George makes the final leg, as the drum’s future owner inspects the goat hide that will become the drum’s head.

Later, after establishing himself in the community, he learned to build the *gumbay* by watching others build it, and took up his present role when the previous man retired. That position has evolved into a special status in the village. George is the official *gumbay* drummer, and though he also has other duties to attend to such as community projects and his own garden, he spends most of his time representing the *gumbay* drum to outsiders:

So me saw this historial drum, seeing that no one would be here to really make a presentation, to whosoever require the trade, of this drum. So I place myself in that fields: making the drum, exposing the drum, could play the drum too, but no, the other brother you meet this morning there, he’s the drummer for the community.

As we spoke about some future time when he might retire, leaving his role to some other Maroon, George again reminded me of the *gumbay*'s religious significance and connection to the Maroon ancestors; *gumbay*-building goes hand in hand with coffin making. George pointed out is that the youth of Accompong lack a connection to the ancestors:

From you live in the wood, you know what people do in the wood, because some of them elder people, some of these kids don't know these people what I'm talking about, if them come down from the cemetery and come out here, they would ask, 'Who is that man?' or, 'Who is that woman?' because they don't know these people, but I do know them because I build the last home for them. Even before I exist, as I was telling you, three day you dead them bury you. Me in that position – 'making a quick drum,' or, 'making a quick casket'."

George's "position" is both drum-builder and casket-maker, and the appropriateness of that juxtaposition of roles goes beyond the functional coincidence of using the same tools and materials. The *gumbay* is an instrument traditionally dedicated to religious use; the Maroons use it specifically to call their ancestors, both legendary heroes and the recently deceased. In the context of the January 6th celebrations, the *gumbay* accompanies other drums and a small chorus in summoning and then entertaining those ancestors, who make their presence known by possessing dancers in various ways. The dances are part of the core of the annual festival and reunion, and are accompanied by food sacrifice and processions, all surrounded by a massive street fair. The *gumbay*'s rhythms are the beating heart of this religious event, in which the people reference and renegotiate their identities and relationships with their ancestors. This drum accompanies Maroon funeral practices, funerary work such as coffin-making and grave-digging, and is used to invoke the dead, inviting them to dance and socialize with the living every year on the festival day (Dje Dje 1998:106, Zips 2000:199-201).

January 6th Festival

I returned to Accompong for the January 6th celebration, six months later, in 2003. My partner and I traveled to Accompong in the company of Duse Thaxter and his troop of *Kumina* performers, who call themselves the “New Creators” (See Chapter Four). This group had been invited to perform, as in years past, as part of an exchange of cultural performances by Maroons from outside of Accompong, and other groups practicing “traditional African” performances. We arrived at mid-morning on Saturday, the 4th, and performances at the Bickle Village stage were already underway. The Bickle Village was completed just in time for this year’s festival, and most of the cultural performances of outsider groups were sequestered there: among them Duse’s New Creators, a Nyabinghi drum ensemble (Nyabinghi is a sacred drumming tradition of the Rastafarians), a group of “Ettu” drummers from Hanover Parish (Ettu is a drum practice of the “Nago” ethnic group, who trace their origins to late 19th century Yoruba immigrants to Jamaica), an ethnically Maroon rifle/drill corps from Westmoreland Parish, and delegations from three Windward Maroon towns: Moore Town, Charles Town and Scots Hall. Each of the delegations from Maroon settlements brought drum ensembles, dancers and were led by their town Colonels.

The visiting Windward Maroon delegations held a place of honor in the sequence of events at Bickle Village stage, playing here just after the completion of the procession from *Kindah*, the climax of the festival. The Moore Town Maroons used the set of two drums called “*prenting*” (Lewin 2000:162, Bilby 1975). The Scots Hall Maroons used a different set, with one large cylindrical single headed drum, and a rectangular “*gumbay*” with only two wedges, in contrast to the Accompong *gumbay*’s square shape with four wedges. The Scots Hall performers’ cylindrical drum had very different construction from that of the Moore

Town *prenting*. This drum actually resembled a *Kumina* drum: with the head attached using a thick band of vine-wood, or “*wiss*,” instead of the *prenting*’s cord and wedge setup. Each group’s music was as different as their drum sets.

These Maroons shared the Bickle stage with Accompong’s Colonel Peddy and his “economist,” representatives from the Jamaican Government, and even the German Ambassador, as television and radio news crews looked on. In this, the international facet of the festival, speeches hailed the Maroon ancestors for their resistance, and also addressed the current state of the community and future visions for Accompong’s development. For many years, the assistance of outside charities and international NGO’s has been crucial to the town’s livelihood and development, and as late as 1995 (Eyre 1995:259) future outcomes seemed to hinge on whether Accompong, and the entire Cock-pit Country would become a Jamaican National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, or both.

In his address at Bickle this year (2003), the Colonel gave no account of these possibilities, instead he said they would try to use their treaty rights to establish a legal status like that of indigenous, or “First Nations” groups, and from there to use that status to attract investment from “big businesses, like those that have made Native Americans in the US more prosperous.” He argued that Native Americans are less impoverished relative to the norm in the US, than Maroons are, relative to the norm in Jamaica. To improve Accompong’s fortunes, he said, they must attract big developers, “like Donald Trump.” Though they never mentioned the words “gambling” or “casino” the Colonel and his economist said that they wanted to make the town a “free enterprise zone,” perhaps referencing both the duty-free manufacturing areas within poor nations, and the casinos on Indian reservations in the US. These important proceedings and announcements at the

Bickle Village culminated several days of activities and performances that were ongoing on the afternoon of the 4th, when we arrived.

We arranged to camp in the yard of Kenroy Cawley. Kenroy is a man of about thirty who owns a shop in the town, next door to his house, just a few steps from George's place. Kenroy is a clean-cut born again Christian, and took good care of us, even witnessing to us in a good natured way. He didn't seem to have a wife, but was raising several school age children. We pitched our tents, before the daily downpour, in the bright haze of late morning, as out on the street, vendors claimed their spots and set up shop.

From the town gates, through the square, and up past Bickle all the way to the school yard and parade ground, booths made from cut saplings lined both sides of the road. As the population of the festival swelled, so did the ranks of vendors, many of whom came from Montego Bay or Kingston to set up shop for the duration. They occupied each stall in turn, installing tarp roofs, and crude counters of scrap wood. Some built cooking fires, and most eventually tapped into the electrical grid by hooking bare wire leads onto the overhead power lines.

In addition to vendors of clothing, food, and souvenirs, there was plenty of entertainment to be had in the street fair. Gambling tables sprung up at sunset each night, with games that included something like "three card monty" played on the street here in the US, but there were several games (cards, dice, and ring-toss games) I did not know, including some that seemed specifically for kids. The main attractions of this street fair were the dancehalls. As makeshift in construction as the vendor's stalls, and powered by similarly daring electrical ingenuity, these installations pulsed through the night each night right through until sunrise. On the 4th and the 5th, two dancehalls went on in addition to the town's one "disco," or permanent club.

On the 6th, these venues were joined by a fourth: a huge enclosure built on the parade ground hosted the popular “Fire Links” *sound-system* from Kingston. Norman Stolzoff, in his book about dancehall culture in Jamaica, relates this anecdote from his fieldwork in Accompong (where he happened to board with my friend George Huggins!). His encounter with the dancehall phenomena at this festival led him to seriously consider it as an expressive practice:

I had come to Accompong to witness ‘authentic’ Maroon culture, not reggae and other mass cultural phenomena that I thought I could easily observe in the rest of Jamaica. [...] Earlier in the day, I attended the traditional ceremony held at the sacred Kindah tree observing the ritual in honor of the town’s ancestors. After the drumming, dancing, and spirit possession had ended, I went back to cool out at our friend George Huggins’ yard. While passing the breeze with George under his thatched lean-to, I first heard the pounding bass lines of the sound systems coming from the school yard a good quarter mile up the dirt road” (Stolzoff 1999:xix)

Through connections he made in Accompong’s dancehalls, Stolzoff went on to form relationships with members of Kingston *sound-system* crews who, like the “Fire Links” crew in 2003, traveled to perform at the rural festival.

The temporary dancehalls drew the largest segment of festival participants, and in the evenings the streets thronged with young people from the nearby parishes. On the national level in Jamaica, this aspect of the festival is as legitimately visible in the media as the news coverage of the speeches and performances at the Bickle Village stage, appearing on flyers, signs and in radio commercials for weeks leading up to the festival. All of these displays to the outside world, the Bickle Village stage, the dancehall, and the street fair, frame a complex of religious rituals centered around a gathering on the morning of January 6 at the *Kindah* tree.

The Ritual Core

All of the above festive elements envelope the serious rituals at the core of this annual festival: feeding the ancestors, especially Kojo himself, through a series of ritual performances, spirit possessions and blood sacrifices. On the evening of the 5th, Sunday, three ladies approached us as we socialized on the bench in front of Kenroy's store. One of them told us they were having a dance, and invited us to join them up at the school yard. We did, and as we passed through the center of town a group of local folks joined us, a few of them toting drums. As peripheral participants trickled into the yard four men and a group of six to eight women made ready for the dance. The three ladies who invited us formed the core of the chorus that would lead the drums in the music for the dance: these were the ladies who knew the songs, and who accepted the possession of ancestral spirits summoned by the drums. The chorus of ladies, the drummers and the *abeng* player make up the "cultural performance group." They carry an official status in the village and, like George Huggins, they are charged with representing a part of Accompong's Maroon heritage to the outside world (Dje Dje 1998:88-89). It's also important to note that none of the participants I spoke with ever referred to the "*Kromanti* dance," but instead called the event a "maroon dance." Kenneth Bilby remarked on this difference between Accompong and other Maroon communities in the liner notes to one of his collections of recordings from Jamaican Maroons (Bilby 1981), which I found quoted by Dje Dje (1998:80). He said the Maroons of Accompong only use the repertoire of *Kromanti* songs in rituals associated with grave-digging and burial, with the exception that they sing them at Kojo's grave in the rituals there on the day of January 6th.

The performers were all middle aged or older, and chatted as one man tuned the *gumbay* with a hammer by tapping the wedges that pierce the legs of the drum. The men had

two other drums in addition to the *gumbay*: a snare and a small bass drum, all made in the style of European-type marching drums but hand-made, perhaps of some of the same local woods as the *gumbay*. The *gumbay* player sat on the ground with the snare player standing on his right and the bass drum player sitting in a chair on his left. As the drummers tuned up, the one of the ladies began pouring libations of white rum. The drummers and others approached her with cupped, outstretched hands and as she poured they then splashed it on their own faces, heads, and drums. When all was ready, the *abeng* player stepped forth and opened by sounding a long complex “invocation” in the sacred bi-tonal code, said to be understandable as speech by “true Maroons”. Then one lady rocked back on her heels and cocked her head back, forcefully calling out the opening line of the first song. As the chorus answered, the drum section broke into a romping beat, and the dance was on.

Gumbay, snare, and bass drummers drove the rhythm, the ladies dancing and calling out songs, call and response, verse and chorus. Between songs they bathed the *gumbay* and the other drums, as well as the drummers and the singers in white rum. The lady in charge of the rum danced holding the bottle, and as the drumming and dancing heated up, she slung it overhead, spraying rum over everyone. The woman who invited us began to enter *myal* trance. She swooned with little jerky movements, but before she could fall one of her fellow dancers moved up behind her, hugging her under her arms, preventing her from falling while continuing to dance. Soon another dancer moved in to assist, supporting the possessed woman from the front as well. In the core of the crowd, made up by the drummers and the performance group’s dancers, participants focused on the possessed person, while one lady sprayed rum over and on everyone. Where I stood, in the penumbra of the crowd, a hundred or so outsiders and onlookers danced in their own ways and paid close attention. Gradually the music and the spirit possessions climaxed and subsided, until

after an hour or more the singers/dancers and the rest of the crowd fell in behind the drummers as they marched out of the school-yard and through the town, in procession to *seal-grounds* like the crossroads and Kojo's monument. *Seal-grounds* are sacred places in the landscape where processions pause to salute and invoke. As the dancing crowd emerged into the center of the village, a moment of amazement washed over me because the size of the crowd on the street seemed to have exploded. The crowd on the street seemed equally awed by our entrance, profoundly affected by the sight of such a throng led by the *abeng*, *gumbay*, and *myal* drums.

Beginning with our first approach to *Kindah* at around 8:30am on the 6th, the Accompong Maroons turned Mandy and me away several times. The first time we were just in sight of the tree when a Maroon up there shouted down, "Not for you yet, it's not safe yet." Later, a crowd of outsiders gathered on the trail to *Kindah*, prohibited from joining the Maroons, who were butchering a specially raised young black hog and several roosters, and preparing the huge pots to cook over the open fire. Only after the animals were sacrificed, butchered and boiling in the pot, did the *abeng* blow, signaling the crowd to come down to *Kindah*.

The unsalted meat boiled as drumming and dancing heated up in the shade of the sacred *Kindah* Tree, following roughly the same format as on the previous evening, but here the crowd was much larger and the participants seemed more diverse. In addition to the cultural performance group from the night before several younger drummers hovered around the huddle of bass, snares and *gumbay*, looking for an opportunity to take a turn playing. All of the ladies who led the dance the night before were there wearing matching outfits: skirts and head-wraps in a colorful print and white t-shirts printed with the words "MAROON TOWN." They were joined by another group of women in different, matching

apparel of the same form. These ladies may have been from a different Maroon settlement, or perhaps were from a different peer group within Accompong.

One participant shouted and exhorted like a *revivalist*, and displayed outward symbols associated with the *Revival Zion* or *Pukumina* religions. Those *revivalist* sects and the Maroon religion each feature music, song, libations, and trance-possession, so all are termed “*myalisti*” after “*myal*,” the Jamaican term for the trance itself. However, *revivalists* are Christians, and in their rituals they are possessed not by the spirits of ancestors, but by the Holy Ghost, and various prophets of the old and new testaments of the Bible (Moore and Simpson 1957). The *revivalist*’s costume used the same print of cloth as the Accompong Ladies, but cut differently. Though made of the identical print of cloth, her outfit was cut like a nun’s habit, in contrast to the matching ankle-length skirts, t-shirts, and head wraps worn by the ladies of the Accompong culture group. The *revivalist* cried out in seeming antipathy to the proceedings, “We salute you, Jesus!” Another seeming outsider, an enthusiastic Rastaman, bounced to and fro through the crowd as though he were in a mosh-pit, and was driven from the inner circle repeatedly by the Accompong Ladies.

None of these disturbances perturbed the spirits possessing the core participants as did the presence of cameras. At one moment a possessed woman was leaped high into the air, smacking down a video camera held aloft by a man who seemed to have permission to film. At another moment, I saw several people holding another possessed woman who had chased a European tourist out of the center of the dance; the Polish woman was ducking and running. She had pressed her camera too close to the group of possessed dancers.

When the food was ready, several washtubs full of pork and yams were sent off down a gated trail to “Old Town,” the site of the original settlement of Accompong, and the location of the graves of the town’s earliest settlers, including Kojo. These rituals were

“Maroon only,” and only a select few made this trek to Kojo’s grave, and then another two miles farther through the rugged country to the site known as the “Peace Cave.” This is said to have been the location of a pivotal ambush during the war (1738), and later, the site of the signing of the treaty that ended the war. Jamaican folklorist Olive Lewin is an “honorary” Maroon and reports from her participation (Lewin 2000:167) in this part of the ritual that Maroons “feed” Kojo and other ancestors in secretive rituals at his grave, then place food sacrifices at other locations on the hike to the Peace Cave. The group undertaking this trek, known as the “Kojo Council” or “the colonels officers,” once excluded women, like the cooks and the drummers (Dje Dje 1998:95), but in 2003 I observed that several women marched in this honor guard.

Meanwhile, the crowd at *Kindah* shared the rest of the food, eating off of banana leaves with their hands. Later, the group that went to the old town and peace cave returned to *Kindah* draped in strands of plant material representing the camouflage technology used by their forebears in guerilla combat, marching in double file with the *abeng* blower at the head of the column. As they rejoined the crowd at *Kindah*, the intensity of dancing seemed to reach a climax. They entered the inner space of the dance with distinctive, martial movements. Jacqueline Dje Dje (1998) identifies this as the height of the performance:

It was as if the Accompong Maroons had spiritually connected and become one with their ancestors. The integration of all these features (music, religion, movement) at one particular moment not only heightened the spiritual effect, but this synergy *created a reality that served as a marker for Maroon identity*. The ritual had reached a climax similar to the point when an African-American folk preacher ends his sermon and the congregation is on its feet, shouting and dancing to the spirit of the words and music. (106, emphasis added)

After a few more songs, we all marched to the parade ground, and then through the same “*seals*” as the night before, with both *abeng* and drums leading the column (see Figure 2.6).



FIGURE 2.6: *Gumbay* drummer and *Abeng* player lead the procession from *Kindah*. *Abeng* player and some others wear “ambush,” in reference to Maroon guerilla tactics in war.

Seals or *seal grounds* are powerful places in the landscape, spots where any procession is likely to halt and regroup, sing a song and or perform a rite, but not every procession uses the same *seals* in the same order. The text of the signs along the tour-route credit *revivalism* and *pukumina* (also known as “*pocomania*,” or “*poco*”) with the origins of the *seal* grounds (see Figure 2.7). In fact, both the idea of *seal grounds* and the bass and snare drum set used with the *gumbay* are recognized as associated with *myalism* (Dje Dje 1998:75-77). *Myalistic* practices in Jamaica range from so-called “cults” like *Kumina* and *Pukumina*, to “respectable Christian” groups like the *Native Baptists* and *Revival Zion*, and exert a profound influence on localized versions of international missionary religions such as the Baptist, Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ, and Pentecostalism. In short, *Myalism* is an island-wide, nation-wide phenomena, which plays a primary, if not central role in the public culture of Accompong Town.



FIGURE 2.7: The tour-route sign next to Kojo's monument and the "first *seal ground*."

The tour sign's definitive identification of "three *seal grounds*" in Accompong again highlights the importance of secrecy for the Maroons. In conversations with local residents, I realized that the sign only tells part of the story. Some of the most ritually important sites in the landscape: the *seals* located at the parade ground, at *Kindah*, and in the abandoned site of "Old Town" are protected by omission. One explanation of the recurring theme of secrecy among Maroons is of course their ethnogenesis under conditions of guerilla warfare, in a situation where:

Every "outsider" in the proximity of the Maroon settlements spelled danger. Anyone who was not sworn to secrecy was not entitled to leave the village, for reasons of security, since treachery was always foremost in their fears. The outcome for such outsiders tended to be death (Zips 1999:171).

Secrecy and hostility to outsiders are especially important in relation to the "*Kromanti* dance," because these tendencies grew out of successful adaptations in the social lives of the people who would later become the ancestral spirits. In this light, secrecy goes hand in hand

with the cultural conservatism of many older living Maroons: in order to maintain contact with the dead and benefit from the relationship, it is vital to preserve the integrity of the ritual, song, language, and dance through which that communion takes place (Zips 1999:173). But there are also very practical, political reasons for the avid maintenance of insider and outsider roles I observed among the Maroons.

First of all, these relatively tiny communities struggle to maintain autonomy and cultural difference in order to preserve their very existence, lest they be absorbed into the Jamaican creole society that surrounds them on all sides. Second, as Maroon communities continue to attract interested outsiders, at first soldiers, then missionaries, and now social scientists and tourism officials, have sought to apply their own projects, either to subdue the Maroons, to “civilize” them, or learn from them some knowledge which, once taken back to the “outside” can no longer be protected from being twisted or misrepresented by the enemies of the Maroons. Third, as a result of their communal inheritance of their land, the Leeward Maroons I spoke with are very concerned with the question of who is and is not a Maroon, and therefore who is (and who is not) entitled to a share in that inheritance. They place a great importance on genealogy, and exclude anyone who cannot prove blood kinship with past residents of Accompong. Looming on the horizon, however, is a potentially explosive economic development around this issue of group membership. If the current Colonel follows through with his plans to develop a gambling resort on the model of those found in North American First Nations (Canada) and Indian Reservations (US), then membership will likely determine who is entitled to money from the profits, and who is left out of those benefits. This is forcing a debate on the future issuance of official Maroon ID cards, but no consensus has emerged on the specifics of such a program, nor on how and by whom those decisions might be made.

In their festival, the Leeward Maroons of Accompong Town go to great lengths to define themselves as special and divergent, relative to other Maroons, to Jamaicans in general, and to various other outsiders. They deploy a host of expressive activities, from gambling to dancing, from drumming for all the guests to quasi-secret animal sacrifices and ritual feeding of the ancestors. In the process, they make claims about their own identities, and negotiate the conditions under which outsiders are allowed to participate. The community builds into their festival an array of interfaces with different outside groups, allowing those groups to define their alliance with the Accompong Maroons on their own terms, as *sound-system* party-goers, or foreign diplomats and journalists. These auxiliary events frame and in a sense buffer the ritual core from outside disturbance, allowing the hosts to isolate it, protecting the secrets at the heart of Maroon heritage, such as the languages of the *abeng* and the *gumbay* drum, and the true meaning of the *Kromanti* songs, which they reserve for the this festival and the graveside. At the heart of the festival, the *gumbay* and *abeng*, carried as symbols of Maroon religious and political identities, respectively, and accompanied by *myal* drummers and dancers, attend the preparation of a food sacrifice that is then delivered by “Kojo’s Men,” who in their leafy garlands and staves represent the military prowess of the Maroon ancestors whose graves they attend on their march to “Old Town.”

CHAPTER THREE
DREAD POETICS INNA DANCEHALL AND AMPHITHEATRE:
IUNTY I ION AND THE ION ITES
OF RASTAFARI

Treasure Beach and Iunty I Ion

Advertisements for Jamaica as a tourist destination most often use the white sand beaches and lush greenery of the island's northern coastal tourist zones or the far-western Negril resort area in their promotional landscape images. In the remote south-western area known as "Treasure Beach," the arid, cactus-dotted plains and hills feel like a different world (see Figure 3.1). The rough seas, rocky shore, black sand and undertows make the beach seem less desirable to some tourists, but the area's tourist economy provides for a segment of visitors who value the remoteness and the friendly atmosphere.



FIGURE 3.1: Looking out across the acacia and Lignum vitae spotted pastures of the Pedro Plain, just inland from "Treasure Beach," toward the Pedro Bluff in the near distance. In the far distance are the Santa Cruz Mountains, the source of the "rain-shadow" that makes this area drier than the rest of the island.

In the late eighties, “fun-and-sun” tourism was in a slump in the old resort areas of Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, and even in the relatively new destination Negril. Meanwhile, back-packers and “post-tourists” (Hawkins 1999:9) were stimulating a wave of new construction in Treasure Beach, a rural coastal area in St. Elizabeth Parish. This small boom included only a few full-scale hotels, but a host of local people built guest rooms, guest-houses, and cabins, and the surge of economic activity stimulated growth in other local businesses, like restaurants, taxis, stores, and bars. In his ethnographic geography of Treasure Beach, Michael Hawkins (1999) depicts the place during a recent period of growth in the tourist industry, from 1994 through 1997.

Much of his fieldwork was actually in the village called “Calabash Bay.” The place-name “Treasure Beach” was taken from the Treasure Beach Hotel, built in nearby village of Frenchman’s Bay in the 1940’s (Hawkins 1999:115-117). Today the toponym “Treasure Beach” encompasses four fishing villages along the coast, Billy’s Bay, Frenchman’s Bay, Calabash Bay, and Great Bay, along with most of the Pedro Plain between the coast and the foot of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The dry pastures of the Pedro Plain are just a few miles wide between the coast and the first range of the Santa Cruz, and just atop that first height is the town of Malverne. I chose this area as the site of my initial fieldwork because I was looking for a rural area with an active *dancehall* scene, hoping to find performers with whom to engage in observant participation. I knew from previous travel in Jamaica that in rural areas and small towns, local residents organize street parties and outdoor dances, often posting signs or flyers in their local rum shops and outside of stores, on poles or fence-posts around town. But my first challenge in choosing a field site was to find a place to live, from which to access the rural *dancehall* parties I hoped to attend.

Luckily, Hawkins' geography of Treasure Beach as a post-tourist destination helped me find the right place. In addition to invaluable details of local history, culture, and economy, the dissertation led me to a website with email addresses through which I found one of Hawkins' consultants, an American woman who runs a tour service. Through her I found Irie Cabins in Great Bay. Located just behind the shore dunes north-west of Great Bay, Irie Cabins occupies one of several contiguous lots all belonging to different members of the Genus family. Both adjacent properties held tourist developments owned by brothers of our hosts. On one side, "Viking's House" was a full vacation villa, while on the other side "Ital Rest" offered several very nice rooms featuring private bathrooms with flush toilets. At Irie Cabins, the three tiny "no-frills" cabins shared a kitchen, an outdoor shower, and a latrine toilet, making these the most economical accommodations I could find other than camping (see Figure 3.2). The family seems to have avoided any hint of competition between their businesses by providing different levels of accommodations at each, and therefore catering to tourists with different price-ranges.

In the late 1990's, a few years after Hawkins' fieldwork there, the area's tourist boom began to subside, and some people I spoke with remarked that business was not going well. Hawkins described Calabash Bay as flush with visitors and activity, but when I visited in 2002, some of the businesses he wrote about were closed, with gates locked, and grass growing high in the yards. Locals attributed the decline to both chronically washed out access roads and the overall drop in visitors from the US after the dot-com crash and the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001. In spite of the trouble with tourism, the people of the area and many of their businesses continue to thrive, especially those who have connection to "family land," where more diverse economic activities (farming, crafts) supplement incomes from the tourism sector.



FIGURE 3.2: My wife and I lived in the cabin on the right during June and July of 2002.

Shirley Genus runs the Irie Cabins for one of her brothers, who lives abroad. Another of her brothers, Frankie, owns and runs the Ital Rest next door. The males of Frankie's generation seem to have inherited their plots from their mother, Miss Mary, who lives just the other side of Viking's house. Frankie, Shirley, and most of their siblings are Rastafarians, though Miss Mary is Seventh Day Adventist. The family still raises several acres of watermelon and scallions to sell, but for the most part they've turned much of their collective property to the business of hosting visitors. I began my fieldwork in Jamaica from this home. I set out to meet Jamaicans involved in local music, and from there identify performers and other consultants willing to participate in my study.

Frankie Genus took an interest in my project and through him I met Iunty I Ion. Iunty's father, Kingsley Brooks, is an associate of Frankie's; they worked together with other local Rastafarians to establish the *Nyabingi* center up in Malverne, convincing the town's

authorities to provide space to construct a *Tabernacle* for worship, right next to the football field on public land. Iunty visits the Genus family and their guests every week or so, carrying a backpack full of hand-made jewelry and souvenirs, t-shirts and *dancehall* mix-tapes, which he sells to the tourists. Frankie sent him over one morning. My wife and I were up early, working on our notes over morning coffee, sitting on the porch. After he showed us his wares we chatted for a while, and in the course of conversation Mandy identified Iunty as a potentially valuable consultant on *Ital* food and cooking, the main subject of her thesis project.

A devout Rastafarian, Iunty says he underwent a dramatic conversion to Rastafari as a teenager, and in his vocational training as a chef in secondary school, he was allowed to study cooking in the *Ital* style. In practice, for Iunty, this means a diet free of meat or any other animal product, with no salt or dried spices, prepared from fresh vegetables, chopped without the use of a cutting board. This way of eating grows out of the Rastafarian ideal of “*Ital Livity*,” (*Ital*: from “vital” I- substituted for vi-, meaning wholesome, free from death or oppression. *Livity*: maybe from “quality,” liv- substituted for qual-, meaning quality of life or “lifestyle” in a holistic sense) the principle of investing wholesome social energy and consciousness in everything one does or says, while avoiding pollution and death. (See Mandy G. Dickerson 2004, Homiak 1995).

Another essential aspect of the *Livity* of nearly all Jamaican Rastafarians can be seen in the peculiar term itself, a new composite word created to replace an old word deemed destructive or insufficient. The idea that language can either uplift or corrupt is known as *word-sound power*. They approach language not a rigid system, but a malleable tool that must be constantly evaluated for efficacy and then reconstructed to conform to reflect social values. Various known as “I-alect,” “Dread Talk,” “I-talk,” etc., the Rastafarians use their

distinctive linguistic regime to dissemble, subvert, and resist the power of *Babylon* to dominate humanity through, among other things, the deceptive and oppressive *word-sound* embedded in standard English, which they see as a language of slavery and slavers. Velma Pollard, in her “The Social History of Dread Talk,” (1983:46-62) identifies three categories of textual differences between Jamaican Creole English and Dread Talk: category I consists of word substitution (*chalice* instead of pipe, *temple* instead of body, *trod* instead of move or travel), in category II particular morphemes, perceived to contain destructive or deceptive *word-sound power*, are replaced with more wholesome or appropriate morphemes (*overstand* instead of understand, *downpress* instead of oppress), category III deals with the “I,” both as a replaced morpheme and as a substituted word (*I and I* from you and me, *Iditation* from meditation, Iunty from Bounty). In her study of the ways that Dread Talk permeated the vernacular spoken by Jamaican teenagers from all walks of life in the 1980’s, Pollard also identifies several more subtle features she ties to Rastafarian influence. Among these are the use of the words *sight*, and *seen*, in several forms as an interjection, such as in the phrase “...*you no see it*,” which seems analogous to the way North Americans add “...you know,” or “...you understand,” to the end sentences that narrate or explain.

But there is much more to the verbal performance of Dread Talk than lexical word-play within a fixed framework. Pollard acknowledges that Dread Talk speakers code switch in the same sense that other speakers of Jamaican Creole English do, to suit the needs of any social situation. In particular, she looks at the ways a group of teenage boys code switch in classroom discussions with their teacher, who overtly disapproves of the pervasive “Rasta speech,” which she sees as degenerate (Pollard 1983:56-59). Without overtly using any of the above markers of Dread Talk, the boys were able to reason with her against intolerance, while subtly marking their speech as “Rasta” in ways that infuriated and mocked the teacher.

In his *dancehall* chants, Iunty brings his Rastafarian agenda into the *dancehall* performance. At the Supper of Rastafari, the Ion Ites use their “Ion Station” as a mode of teaching and appealing to the various groups participating in that festival. In each context, performers tailor their use of Dread Talk to suit the social situation and the collective agendas of both performers and audiences.

As I proceeded with my plan to do ethnography of *dancehall* music, Iunty began advising me about local events, and I learned about his involvement as a *deejay* (vocalist) with a local *sound-system* crew, “Ites International,” and introduced me to his own style of “*roots*” *deejay* chanting. This style of *dancehall* vocal performance, a significant segment in the overall spectrum of *dancehall* styles (Stolzoff 2000:164), is defined by the lyrical expression of Rastafarian ethical and moral sensibilities; the performance of *Ital Livity* in the form of a *dancehall deejay*’s chant. Though the poetics of most *dancehall* performances are explicitly secular, often outright profane, *roots dancehall* style offers a contrasting poetic discourse of social and political consciousness interwoven with Rastafarian religious rhetoric.

Below, I will focus on this emergent, expressive dimension of Rastafarian cultural identity: verbal poetic performance for entertainment and education, outside of the sacred context of worship in the *Nyabingi Tabernacle*. I will sketch some of the basic features of *dancehall* in Jamaica, while I take you with me to a rural *dancehall* party. We’ll discuss some of Iunty’s reasonings concerning his faith and his music. Through his spoken words and chanted lyrics, we may come to a better understanding of how he negotiates his own poetic identity(ies) across Jamaica’s poly-musical cultural landscape. Finally, we’ll visit a festival put on by Iunty and his brethren, the Ion Ites of Rastafari, in an outdoor amphitheatre in downtown Montego Bay. This second annual “Supper of Rastafari” was a celebration of *Ital*

music and food, dedicated to teaching and entertaining the general public. But before we head up to Montego Bay, let's start in St. Elizabeth Parish, let's got to the dance.

Encounters with *Dancehall*

Well after dark on a Friday evening we climbed up the road leading out of Treasure Beach, past the big washout where all the cars bottom out. This was my first chance to carry Mandy, my wife and fieldwork partner, on the motorbike I rented earlier that day in Negril. We had only a vague idea of our destination, a party being hosted by a *sound-system* crew called "True Love Sound," in the town of Mountainside, about ten miles away to the northwest along the road that follows the foot of the Santa Cruz Mountains. We had seen the signs in town for a week, hand-lettered in bright colors on a black background, posted on the telephone pole at the crossroads, and on the fence across the street from the grocery store in the town of Junction. As we rode, the air became cooler, and brought the scent of this more humid and fertile agricultural area. Along the roadside, at isolated rum-shops, and sometimes just milling around chatting across their front gates, many young people socialized, some seemed dressed up to go out, some were packing themselves into overcrowded cars and onto the backs of motorbikes. After stopping several times to ask directions, we arrived in the area of Mountainside.

Parked cars and motorbikes lined the road for a hundred yards on either side of the little one-room country store at the hub of the party, filling both the roadside and the grassy area between the drainage ditch and the fence of the pastures lining this country lane. Fenced pastures covered most of the area, except for the yard immediately around the store, so most of the people were partying out in the road. I parked the bike against the fence and we joined the fun. In this outer area of the party, people stood around or leaned on cars, some danced, paying attention to the *sound-system* and the performers, but most socialized

and talked. Cars and motorbikes pushed through the crowd, some just arriving and trying to park, some cruising through again and again, beeping horns, revving engines or otherwise clowning around. We walked up the road toward the store, moving closer to the center of the party, and the stage set up on the store's front porch. On the stage, a *selecta* and a *deejay* operated turntables and sound controls, and through the open door behind them the store became their crew's clubhouse for the evening.

In this kind of performance, *selecta* chooses records and operates the turntable, mixer, and sampler, while the *deejay* is the vocal and verbal performer. The *dancehall's selecta* and *deejay* are roughly analogous to North American hip-hop's "deejay" and "emcee," respectively. In both Jamaica and the U.S., the term "deejay" comes from the acronym D. J., for "disc jockey," the person on the radio who both operates the record player and talks to the audience. While the *dancehall deejay* can sometimes fill both roles, he usually concentrates on entertaining the audience by talking, chanting, and singing, while musically accompanied by a *selecta*, a specialist who is in charge of selecting the records over which the *deejay* will perform.

In the field next to the store several stalls had been constructed of sapling poles, corrugated zinc, and thatch, from which vendors sold sodas, beer, *roots wine*, *jerk chicken*, and the goat head stew known as *mannish water*. Circulating through the audience, referred to as the *massive* (Cooper 1993:136), several young boys worked collecting the recyclable bottles and also selling trinkets and firecrackers. The center of the dance, just in front of the *deejay* stand, remained empty, hollow like the eye of a storm; only sporadically did anyone become excited enough to dance into the eye, and then only for a few moments. All around the periphery of this space, the crowd pressed in close, some dancing in couples, but many more participating as individuals, dancing, watching the performers and flicking cigarette lighters

over their heads. Some guys sprayed aerosol cans over their lighters, throwing fireballs out over the central area. The sound was impressively loud, though the three ten foot high stacks of speakers looked even larger than the sound they were making. Each time the bass hit, the lone bare light-bulb above the *deejay*'s head dimmed along with everything else attached to the electrical grid, as the amplifiers drew current, causing the whole scene to pulse with the beat.

In the crowd the vibration was sociable and positive. Most people mingled, talking as they congregated around parked cars, some drinking beer and just as many smoking *spliffs* of *ganja*. Even though my wife and I stood out as foreigners in the scene, and many others in the dance took notice of our presence, none took issue with it, except to strike up friendly conversations with us. From the *deejay* stand on the porch, both *deejay* and *selecta* had access to the sound control board and other effects, like the sampler (an electronic device which reproduces short "samples" of music or sound effects) which they used to pepper their arrangement of recorded music and live verbal performance with bomb blasts, gunfire, laser sound effects, and sound-bytes containing short catch phrases and endorsements from popular vocalists. As I mentioned before, the work of producing, re-performing, the music of the dance hall is sometimes divided between a *selecta* and a *deejay*; the former operates the turntables while the latter delivers the *talk-over* and hosts the event, although sometimes the same person performs both roles simultaneously. In their performance, this team also used many *rewinds*, and *pull-ups*, where the *selecta* stops or reverses the song while the *deejay* taunts the *massive*, demanding they cheer and flash their lighters, to build tension and excitement in the crowd.

But the *deejay* and the *selecta* could never produce the entire event by themselves. The rank-and-file supporters of a *sound-system* crew organize their event's promotion, control

vending and security, construct temporary structures, move and set up the equipment, and deal with the owner of the venue. The *sound-system* crew is can be both a business enterprise, and social aid organization or fraternal lodge (Stolzoff 2000:48). A kind of symbiosis exists between *sound-systems* and local businesses like *rum-shops*, general stores, or even gas stations. Sometimes they form a cooperative so that the store becomes the sound's clubhouse or home-base. In return the store is made the center of the sound's events, and the store's owner is enriched by the vending opportunities associated with *dancehall* events. Sound crews and dance promoters can also participate leagues like the "St. Elizabeth Round-Robin Family." This kind of organization coordinates the activities of several crews and venues in a local area, and promotes a series of competitions between *sound-systems*, in a round-robin type of tournament. In each competition, two sound-systems set up at the same dance, and they take turns playing to the audience until the crowd's choice of favorite *sound-system* becomes obvious, and the losing crew must shut down their equipment for the night.

I was puzzled after reading Carolyn Cooper's account of sexual liberation through *slackness* in the *dancehall* (1995:136-173), because the events I observed seemed much less sexually flamboyant than those she described. *Slackness* is a Jamaican term referring to loose morals, and usually includes promiscuous sexual behavior and explicit sexual talk. She described gangs of young *dancehall queens* arriving en masse, dressed in *x-rated* styles and competing with other female gangs in displays of erotic dancing and verbal performance. Stolzoff's (2000) observations made it apparent that the rural *dancehall* crowds differ from those in Kingston, in their musical aesthetics and their social behaviors. Stolzoff notes that the shift to *slackness* and the *x-rated* styles in Kingston came in the wake of the political sea change of the early 1980's, when Edward Seaga's conservative *JLP* party ousted the more socialist-leaning *PNP* party of Michael Manley. This corresponded with the decline in the

popularity of reggae music, and a resurgence of Kingston's *dancehall* scene (Stolzoff 2000:99-100). The stylistic contestation and political partisanship overlaid deeper oppositions between what Cooper calls "uptown" and "downtown" social blocs. Uptown and downtown refer to attitudes of people in different parts of Kingston. Uptown connotes conservative middle class values, color prejudice (brown skin over black), and fear of downtown attitudes and people. Downtown attitudes celebrate a radical individualism rooted in the experiences of some of Jamaica's poorest people, and their struggles to survive in some of the world's worst ghettos, in downtown Kingston.

While both Cooper and Stolzoff worked primarily with *dancehall* performers from Kingston, Cooper's analysis focuses on texts extracted from performances in Kingston's permanent music venues, or discotheques. In contrast, Stolzoff's consultants were the owners, promoters and performers associated with Kingston's mobile *sound-systems*, which play dances that take place on lawns, or temporarily constructed music venues, and many of their performances take them on the road to "the country," where the "hardcore" *dancehall* fans still practice a male-centered approach to performance; where women dress much more conservatively, seldom arrive unaccompanied by dates, and therefore are greatly outnumbered by men and boys. This is more like the approach taken by the participants in the events I attended. That rural conservatism also coincides with a preeminence of verbal performances steeped in *roots* style, along with less elaboration of violent *gun lyrics* and less moral *slackness* (Stolzoff 2000:111, 206).

The morning after the *dancehall* event in Mountainside, Iunty showed up at our cabin, and we socialized while I did some laundry. As I strained over the tubs in the yard, and Iunty relaxed in the shade of our porch, I told him about our night out at the country *dancehall*. Unimpressed, he explained that his own associates, Ites International Sound,

would host a party (“*keep a show*”) in Malverne next week. He wanted to know what I wanted in the *dancehall*, and I bored him for a while talking about ethnography and poetics in musical performances, but his eyes lit up when I mentioned my intent to make sound recordings of those performances. Nodding toward my laptop computer, he asked if I would use it to record (see Figure 3.3). I explained that I would probably use “mini-disc” recorder in the field, but suggested that we could record something on my computer, and asked him if he had any instrumental recording we might use for background music. Iunty brought some CD’s from his backpack, and within minutes we began mixing Iunty’s chants over the music, using the instrumental version of Eryka Badu’s song “Bag Lady” (2000) and also the Sly and Robbie version of the theme from “Peter Gunn” (1986).

The passages below are not simply spoken, they are chanted and sung. I decided to represent these chants and those in the following sections as though they were poems, the way that song lyrics are represented in album liner notes, but also following Cooper’s example (1995). In performance, these verses exist as more/other than poems on a page, or even sounds in a recording; they exist as verbal formulas, as building blocks of improvisational lyrical performance. Much of the text and presentation are Iunty’s original creation, but he also shares certain verses and phrases with other colleagues. Part of his repertoire overlaps with chants used by the Ion Ites, but much of the material seems tailored to use with the Ites International sound system, based in Malverne. The lyrical components of this segment, which I separate with double spaces, occur in different improvised versions on other recordings, and Iunty shares some segments, such as the one beginning “food that you eat” with Ion Ite colleagues like Iney I Ion.



FIGURE 3.3: Iunty I Ion sipping on roots tonic on my porch, alongside the computer we used to make recordings.

“Destruction Upon a Sound-Bwoy”
(by Iunty I Ion)

Yuh! Ites International the big bad sound!
I and I say kill and destroy anything come cross bad
Easy King Tommy, ca this year yu collect a big bagga grammy
Easy Nya, I a blaze the big bagga kaya, man
Iunty I Ion say so, the chanter, Ites International, wahtcha no no!
Better look! Better look!

A destruction, upon a sound-bwoy now
Ca me know Ites International a lick dem down
A destruction, upon a sound-bwoy now
Ca me know Ites International a true dat sound
Seh, nuff sound gone, many more to come
From a sound-star flop, seh me know seh he done
And Ites International you know we cyan done
Ca the music we play sweet like booger plum
When I and I chant people cyan si’dung
Ca a positive sound I an I a sen’come
So gwan King Tommy ca yu know yu welcome

Food that you eat can make you live miserable
Rebel trod to the hills and we go sow vegetable
Food that you eat can make your soul miserable

Ion till up the soil and we go sow vegetable
 Me ha fe say it is not enjoyable
 To have an innocent animal inna yu plate pon table
 So a man soweth, so does he reap
 I never plant animal and don't come to reap meat
 Haile Selassie I bless I and I
 So I can plant scallion and thyme
 Watch me now, seh.
 Plant ganja an a it I a go reap
 Seh me plant indian corn an a it I a go reap
 Seh me plant india kush an a it I a go reap
 Plant nuff carrot an a it I a go reap
 Seh me plant up turnip and a it I a go reap
 Plant beet root and a it I a go reap
 Me never plant animal so me naa go reap meat
 Gi I the ganja ca the ganja vital, ay!
 Ca me love to burn the ganja when me nyamin Ital
 Tell dem we hail Haile Sellassie I, me no worship idol
 The people see I an they ask I why
 Rastafari reply, I! I! I! Empress Menen an a Haile Selassie I!

Watch me now seh, Nuff sound gone, many more to come
 Dem a chase all night like dawn, me seh precious an winsome
 The word from me mouth is like a bullet from a gun
 When I an I chant people cyan si'dung
 So destruction, upon the sound-bwoy now
 Ca me know Ites International a true dat...
 Sound-bwoy come a dance and me lop off him tongue
 Him a chase all night like dawn, precious, me seh, an winsome
 The lyrics from me mouth is like the bullets from a gun
 This a positive sound I and I a sen come
 Me tell you three sixty five, twenty four seven
 I and I have dub fe every season
 Fe the winter, the summer, spring and autumn
 I could a sing or deejay or combination
 We no see no sound-bwoy fe test we, one fe one
 Ca the sound is the program of murderation
 Seh destruction, upon the sound-bwoy now

The first “verse” and the last are focused on the business of the *dancehall*:
 acknowledging the *sound-system*’s owner/manager King Tommy, and bragging about their
 “*big, bad sound*.” The “*sound-bwoy*” can refer to any member of a rival *sound-system* crew, and in
 the text he stands in as a proxy for any and all potential rival *sound-systems*, enabling Iunty to
 heap poetic violence and “*murderation*,” upon them. In the middle section, however, the

strongest *roots* themes emerge, and here he highlights some important aspects of his own *Livity* as a Rastafarian: hailing both Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen together, praising the beneficial nature of *ganja*, bringing a “*positive sound*” among the party-goers at the *dancehall*, and avoiding death, especially in the diet, by growing one’s own vegetarian food and shunning meat.

These *roots* themes contrast starkly to the *slackness* themes prevalent in the urban performances Cooper features, and even the “hardcore” *dancehall* styles of the big mobile *sound-system* dances studied by Stolzoff. Even so, the rural *dancehall* remains a space of contestation, and the oppositional, creative-competitive aesthetic that grows out of the *sound-system clash* format permeates performances; even when there is no other sound to clash with, a faceless generic adversary, *sound-bwoy*, stands in as the object of verbal assault. Live *dancehall* talk-over performance also echoes through these lines in Iunty’s praise and support of King Tommy, the owner and operator of the Ites International *sound-system*.

Now, in Cooper’s analysis, this *roots* style would be interpreted as being part of the uptown/downtown opposition she sees as so salient over in Kingston. In this scheme, Rastafarian *roots* performers express an uptown attitude, moralizing in opposition to the downtown expressions of working class Black Jamaicans, and their lyrics romanticizing guns, girls, and money. But the social contexts of performance are different in the rural areas outside of the capitol city, such as the sites of the events I attended. Though political patronage is still a fact of life in the country, most areas are remote from the kind of open partisan conflict that afflicts the so-called “garrison communities” of downtown Kingston (Harrison 1988). Further, while the national media inundates the lives of even the most rural Jamaicans with images and sounds of the urban *dancehall*, and big mobile sounds from Kingston headline at rural special events, such as holidays and festivals, the majority of

dancehall events in the country feature local *sound-systems* and performers. Thus, although it is relevant at the national scale, the uptown/downtown opposition is rooted in the social geography of Kingston, a phenomenon understood, but not necessarily eminent in the same sense, elsewhere in Jamaica. Iunty's chants tout a consciousness steeped in Rastafarian values, but don't necessarily focus only on opposition to *slackness*.

As Iunty and I worked together, he began to explain to me about his association with Ion Ites Family, and to tell me about an upcoming event they were planning. It was to be a free event for the general public, intended as an outreach from the Ion Ites to all Rastafarians and Jamaicans in general, for the purpose of education and entertainment. In the week leading up to the event, Iunty and I traveled the countryside around Malverne, collecting vegetables to be used to prepare food at the event. St. Elizabeth had been hit by bad weather in mid-June, lingering rains that rotted many of the parish's specialty crops, such as watermelons and cucumbers, in the field, so it was difficult to find enough vegetables, but we managed. With the festival planned for Saturday, Iunty's colleague I-stan Ion drove his rickety old Lada down from Montego Bay on Wednesday to collect Iunty and the vegetables.

The Supper of Rastafari

Iunty and his brethren, the Ion Ites, intended for the show to be both a celebration of *Ital* living and a public service announcement. Iunty called it "The Second Annual Supper of Rastafari: A Night With a Difference," making sure I got the subtitle correct. In an amphitheater that occupies a round-about right on the waterfront in downtown Montego Bay, the I Ion Ites staged the festival as a free public service. They cooked up *Ital* food for hundreds, selling it cheap with plenty of free information and musical vibrations, as live performances continued through the night literally until morning.

The main elements of the festival came together by early afternoon on the day of the festival (see Figure 3.4). In the photograph below, the kitchen is nearly complete, and Iney I installs a tarp sun/wind break as Iunty preps veggies. In the mid-ground stands the modular stage and the *sound-system* station – the *selecta* for the duration was Victory, from the King of Spades sound system. Throughout the day and night, Victory backed the I Ion Ites and their “Ion Station,” co-ordinating and re-synthesizing recorded music (using both CD’s and traditional vinyl records) and samples, creating an original and stylized musical accompaniment to vocal performances when needed. On the top row of the amphitheatre, at street level in the back, are tables with information from a government health and social services agency, as well as the Ethiopian World Federation, and the Twelve Tribes of Israel, a Rasta sect organized like a conventional religion



FIGURE 3.4: Iunty prepares vegetables in the Ion Spice Kitchen (Photo by Mandy G. Dickerson)

Through Iunty we met the rest of what he calls the Ion Ites Family. The core group most involved with this festival included Ion Flames Lightnin, Istan I Ion, Iney I Itofa Ion, the I-lah-ful I (AKA “The Golden Ankh”), Ishankh I Ion, and our friend Iunty. Except for Iunty, most of the Ion Ites we met resided around Montego Bay. While some seemed to be living with wives and children, others lived on several different “yards” on a rotating basis, traveling from “yard” to “hills camp” as needed. The following section is based a few days of collaboration before and during the Supper of Rastafari, informal follow up interviews with performers, and later interactions with them on the street in Montego Bay.

Throughout my time in the field, I tried to take field notes at regular intervals, and photographed people and landscapes. Using a “mini-disc” recorder (Sharp MD-MT877), I recorded interviews and musical performances when I was permitted to do so. I recorded live performances by the Ion Ites during the stage show segment of the Supper of Rastafari. As in the performance by Iunty above, standing in for the actual verbal performances, I have represented the poetics of the Ion Ites in graphical/textual form as poems. Though this format cannot possibly capture the nuance or even the cadence, I offer these versions as an attempt to relay to you some sense of what they chant and how they chant it. As I said above in the introduction, representing Jamaican English as text demands some compromise between purely phonetic spelling and standard orthography. I use Adams’ (1991) system of spelling and punctuation, but in this context I have to adapt that system to the poetic alteration of Jamaican English by Rastafarians.

The I Ion Ites practice a Rastafarianism that is like that described by Homiak (1995) in his discussion of the Igelic House, or the Ites of Rastafari. Along with the Youth Black Faith group mentioned above in chapter one, the Igelic elders interviewed by Homiak participated in a renewal of the Rastafarian movement in the 1950’s and early 1960’s. They

were among the first groups to advocate wearing dreadlocks, and helped formulate the ideal of *Ital Livity*. Both practices are now hallmarks of Rastafarianism worldwide. Homiak described another expressive practice of the Igelics which he calls “*higes-knots*”: “higes” refers to a complaining or harassing protest and “knots” to the movement of Igelic rastas in tight groups, proxemically speaking, when in public. *Higes-knots* is like a roving protest march with no planned route, in this formation Igelics assemble to reason together, conduct daily affairs, as well as confront evil-doers in the community. The Ion Ites seem to use this in practice, but I never heard them refer to it as such. Other notable practices and beliefs that tie the Ion Ites group to the Igelic House of the 1960’s are the wearing of burlap clothing, going barefoot, celibacy, shunning things seen as unnatural and adhering to a strictly *Ital* diet.

As with Iunty, an *Ital* diet for the rest of the Ion Ites means no meat or animal products of any kind, no salt or dried spices; food must be prepared from fresh vegetables (with the possible exception of flour and cornmeal for dumplings) cut without the use of a cutting board, and served in a natural container such as a coconut shell or calabash bowl. They approve of no pipe water, and no preserved or canned food. Their particular take on *Ital* is somewhat extreme, or perhaps idealistic, relative to the practices of most Rastafarians. In the context of this festival, the application of “*Ital*” values to all aspects of life becomes a central theme around which the various performers build solidarity. The I Ion Ites use the festival to reach out across perceived divisions between sects, or “houses” of Rastafarians, calling on the common religious ground they share, and also negotiating what kind of diversity is acceptable within that consensus.

The Ion Station

Core members of the I Ion Ites perform as a musical group. They form the Ion Station, a performance framework in which the leaders moderate through monologues and

chants, bringing to the stage individuals and groups of other brethren to chant or sing.

Poetically, they model the format after a radio broadcast. In the words of I-lahful I, one of the Ion Ites also known as “the Golden Ankh”:

See, the Ion Station
The Ion Station ain’t no paper station
Where you program your program
On paper, or computer
Then pay an announcer to read you’re program
You see the Ion Station
The Ion station is where you get it live out of the heavens,
Of heavens, of heavens, of all the heavens.
So, a deh we deh, (*there we are*)
A deh we a go stay. (*there we’ll stay*)

Unlike an actual radio station, the Ion Ites don’t plan out their performance “on paper or computer,” the Ion Station is the result of inspiration “out of the heavens.” Through that collective inspiration, what I-stan Ion called “*Iritical Iration*” (critical creation), the Ion Ites innovated a means for entertaining and educating, using a mix of mock public service announcements and new reports, oration, a capella chanting, and live musical performance.

The Ion Ites and their Ion Station formed the core of the stage-show portion of the festival. A *selecta* called Victory, from the King of Spades *sound-system*, supported the Ion Station musically. Victory selected *dancehall* tunes to fill the moments between performers, and he used signature tracks to introduce and sometimes accompany members of the Ion Ites during their performances. This performance format resulted in a show that was like a long “variety show” or a telethon; from early afternoon on Saturday, through about 5am Sunday morning, the Ites hosted a multitude of speakers and performers, including many Ion Ites performers, *Nyabingi* drummers, *Kumina* drummers, and *dancehall deejays*.

In this space where the counter-hegemonic, yet discursively enforced moral order enacted by the Ion Ites presided over the production of music and the construction of place, a very diverse group of people with different messages were allowed to perform. The overall

show was in this way multivocalic, but at the same time tightly controlled and directed toward a message of Black pride and solidarity, infused with a distinctly Jamaican, distinctly Rastafarian, sense of collective identity. Performers rhetorically constituted this message through themes of resistance to racism, colonialism and exploitation, often metaphorically represented by North American fast food businesses, “all inclusive” resort tourism, bauxite extraction, and other aspects of post-colonial capitalist enterprise in Jamaica.

In his role as master of ceremonies, Ion Flames Lightning controlled the flow of performers to and from the stage, often delivering monologues as well as introductions. Since the festival was in a park directly across the street from a McDonalds restaurant, a steady stream of young people walked past the park with bags of fast food and cups soda. Over the *sound-system’s* speakers, Ion Flames implored several groups of these youths to discard their burgers; he offered free *Ital* food and fresh juice to any who would throw away their expensive American style fast food and join the festival.

Here, in keeping with the theme of the event as a “public service announcement,” Ion Flames issues a mock news bulletin, warning of both political and nutritional harms that might result from patronizing McDonald’s, Burger King, or KFC restaurants:

“Ion Flames’ Warning”
(by Ion Flames Lightning)

You’re in tune to the Ion Station
This is Ion Flames Lightning
reporting, for the Ion Station
Ion Station, news...

Three mercenary groups have recently invaded Jamaica
Going by the name of KFC, Mack Donald, and King Burger
You are warned to avoid such places,
And turning to such places is dangerous to your health
If, for some reason, you do have to pass those buildings
You are hereby asked and ordered
To stay on the other side of the road
To take your kerchief and cover your nose,

And don't look at the building
And no matter what they give away there,
You must not enter there
Because they may tell you
You can win a F150
But they will never tell you
That they're giving you
Prostate cancer
And mad cow disease.

The "F150" referred to here is a Ford F150 pickup truck. In the summer of 2002 McDonalds' in Jamaica held a contest, and the truck was the grand prize. American style pickups are not very common in Jamaica, the expense of obtaining and maintaining them makes them impractical for most, and the left-side steering and wide wheelbase makes them ungainly and obnoxious on the narrow roads and lanes of Jamaica. In spite of their impracticality, they are, along with SUVs, becoming increasingly popular as status symbols.

A hamburger from McDonalds, another status symbol, is in many ways foreign food to Jamaicans. In the poetics of the Ion Station, McDonalds becomes a nemesis sowing seeds of destruction: A foreign company, doing business in a foreign way, selling a foreign (and unwholesome) food, yes, but also an invader, a "mercenary group" and a danger to the public worthy of a warning on the "news". The appeal being made by Ion Flames is about more than the nutritive value of the snacks carried by those youths passing by. He is appealing to them to resist a colonized way of life that, to him, McDonalds represents. The alternative that he holds out to them is represented in the elements of the festival they have created: *Ital* food, wholesome music without any lewdness (*slackness*), and an atmosphere of fellowship and reconciliation.

Earlier on Saturday, having gathered fresh vegetables from around the island and spring water from up in the hills, they had begun to build a kitchen in the park. They brought in a propane stove from Ishankh Ion's local restaurant, plus used a few cooking

stands made from automobile wheels and rebar, in which one simply builds a fire in the middle of the wheel and places the pot on top to cook. At the height of the food preparation work, Iunty and Ishankh even started a pot of dumplings on a small ground fire. Alongside the stage, from which performers, especially the Ion Ites, made constant reference to it, the kitchen constituted an integral (i.e. in no way peripheral or auxilliary!) part of the Supper. Here is Ion Flames' invitation to "feed up *Ital*" at the Ion Spice *Ital* Kitchen.

"Ion Spice Invitation"
(by Ion Flames Lightning)

Iyah know seh the Ion spice Ital kitchen
Right over there
With live food
With no poison
Food we ha prepare with spring water
'ca we no use chlorine
Is there for you
At cheap prices
So just free yourself
and walk there.

Victory
King of Spades
Ion station

At McDonalds in Jamaica, the prices are high: two or three times the prices in the US. I think I remember a double cheeseburger costing ~JA\$240, nearly five US dollars. For Jamaican customers, there is an element of conspicuous consumption in their choice to eat there. Groups of teenagers who seemed to be on dates or going out in groups cruised the downtown sidewalks all day and through the night: they would get their food to go and then leave the restaurant and go hang out downtown or on the beach, where they socialized and seemed to be displaying their soda cups and bags. Their choice of clothing, shoes, and hairstyles gave me the impression that they were acting like African American teenagers. The boys wore baggy jeans, athletic jerseys from NBA or NFL teams, and flashy Nike or

Reebok sneakers. The girls seemed inclined to skin-tight jeans and mini-skirts, “stressed” by the designer with decoratively frayed, torn, or bleached areas on the seat and on the front of the leg above the knee to expose, or at least draw attention to, those areas.

The *Ital* alternative presented by the festival was “spiced” with meaning in addition to nutrition. Ras I, an elder of the *Nyabingi* House (another sect of Rastafarians) reasoned with me on the day of the festival, “The dead are for the cemetery, and can do the living no good. The living need live food.” At another moment, the Rocked-Up Chanters, two brothers aged about ten years old took the stage, chanting over a *Nyabingi*-style rhythm, “We a go rock the city, without no pity, ‘ca dem a take dem belly turn cemetery, bwai,” (paraphrase: “because they turn their bellies into cemeteries”). The meat, milk, salt, preservatives, and chlorine they avoid are called upon in these performances, as in the everyday rhetoric of those who are strictly “*Ital*”, to stand in poetically for murder, exploitation, oppression, and pollution.

In this way, poetically, the North American fast food giants also stand in for colonialism and economic domination from outside Jamaica. The invitation from Ion Flames on the stage, to “free yourself, and walk there” is an invitation to participate in a social and political interaction that is more natural and wholesome, in parallel to the food. Rastas of various stripes shared the stage and socialized with representatives from the Ethiopian World Federation, the United Negro Improvement Association, and from the Jamaican Government. The message from most of the speakers and performers focused on solidarity and coalition building, while all heaped vilification on slavery and colonialism.

Poetics and Political Identity

In his book *Dancing With the Devil*, Jose Limon (1994) addresses the complexities of what he calls “cultural poetics,” arising out of a vaguely consensual “political unconscious,”

or a shared sense of the facts of social life in a group at a particular time. He deals with the machismo of Mexicano Texan men, and the poetics revealed in the dancehall folklore of South Texas. His subjects draw on an un-self-conscious sense of identity and belonging in their social/ethnic group in constructing verbal performances about themselves, alternately ignoring or playfully commenting on contradictions and ambiguities present in their discourse of group identity. Limon's insight is that while cultural poetics seem to be informed by a political unconscious, and the discourse that results is sometimes stridently resistant, it is never truly unambiguous or free from contradictions. I see this as a result of constant negotiation of identity between and among the members of any group. At the Supper of Rastafari, the I Ion Ites created a unequivocal performance in support of their goal of coalition building among various "Houses" of Rastafari (*Nyabingi*, Twelve Tribes, and *Bobo Ashanti* were represented), "Afrocentric" political organizations (Ethiopian World Federation and the Universal Negro Improvement Association), "traditional African" cultural groups such as the *Kumina* practitioners, and the host of sympathetic spectators and performers. Contradictions to popular discourses about Rastafarianism emerged from many performances, especially those of the Ion Ites themselves.

As if in response to criticisms of Rastafarianism as backward and sexist, I Ion Ites chanter Iney I Itofa expounded on his own gender and political philosophy, mixed with fire and brimstone. He blistered western Christianity in a summation of Rasta belief about their image of Jesus, "Flames and fire burn up Judas, Melt him fat and fry White Jesus." Yet most of his message was focused on themes like the need to drive safely, and the dangers of eating meat. In the following chant he addresses issues associated with international politics, mobility, and inequality. In the next, he answers feminist critiques of chauvinistic tendencies

among Rastafarians with a manifesto of respect for women, in which he, like Iunty in the above chant, refers to “Empress Menen,” Haile Selassie I’s female counterpart.

“A Mi Yard”

(by Iney I Itofa)

A mi yard,
mi deh imagine how mi go improve mi skills
Iyah think all kinda different ways how mi nation can build
This is a form of demonstration
It’s no quarrel, mi no quarrel
Though them a cut down the black population with birth control pill.

Look how much gone a prison
And how much thousands them kill.
Them take the levelest part of the land
and left man up in a the hill.
Own all these big buildings that poor people build
I think dem naa go move there if a river stand still

We yard not fe crack remember (*seven a soft soap?*)
How come dem a angry like we haggga (*harass*) goat?
How the hell we can’t fly from down a airport?
We want the visa fe stamp inna we passport.
A mi yard...

If man could swim cross the ocean
Whole heap a man would a gone across the sea already man
Man I no wanted man
Man I no prisoner man
Free free like a bird in a tree
Why lay one place too long
Like they wan man get stale?
They make it look like
Seh man in a jail
And if, man in a jail then man wan get bail
In a plane that fly, or pon ship that sail.
We have, whole heap a friend over foreign fe hail.
Why dem a insult black people intelligence?
Rastafari never make no wire fence.
Right now we have a whole heap a foreigner friends
Who come visit us every now and then,
A fe we time we look forward fe them
And dem a make it look seh foreigner heaven.
How dem come a we yard, a we can’t go off with them?
If man could swim cross the ocean
Whole heap a man would a gone across the sea already man

Man I no wanted man
Man I no prisoner man
Free free like a bird in a tree
A mi yard...

A mi yard,
mi deh imagine how mi go improve mi skills
Iyah think all kinda different ways how mi nation can build
'This is a form of demonstration
It's no quarrel, mi no quarrel
Though them a cut down the black population with birth control pill.

Look how many gone a prison
And how many thousands them kill.
Them take the levelest part of the land
and left man up in a the hill.
Own all these big buildings that poor people build
I think dem naa go move there if a river stand still

We yard not fe crack remember (*seven a soft soap?*)
How come dem a angry like we haggga (*haras*) goat?
How the hell we can't fly from down a airport?
We want the visa fe stamp inna we passport.

Of all of the Ion Ites, Iney I was the most effective performer. In his movements and vocal delivery, he seemed experienced, and the crowd responded more exuberantly to his performance than any other. He may be a regular *deejay* with King of Spades, judging from the fact that the *sound-system's* sampler had several samples of his voice, which Victory used to interject phrases into the soundscape such as “Hard and Tough! Unconquerable!” and “King of Spades sound! You no see it?” Still, his chants included none of the *dancehall* posturing, *sound-bwoy* killing, or references to *ganja* that Iunty's chant featured above. In Iney I's chant just above, take special note of how he positions his performance as discourse rather than confrontation; as “a form of demonstration” rather than a quarrel. The phrase “a mi yard” translates roughly as “at home,” but in the context of international travel, “yard” is synonymous with the island of Jamaica. At home, in Jamaica, he is considering how to improve himself and his nation, trying to approach the problem reasonably, in spite of their

oppressed and marginalized status in the world. “How dem a come a we yard, an we cyan go off with them?” He asks, puzzled over the disparity in freedom of mobility between himself and the foreigners who visit Jamaica. The following passage was sung a capella; out of respect and seriousness, Iney insisted that Victory stop the music so he could chant it “*pon breeze*.”

“Tribute to Every Daughter”
(Iney I Itofa)

Tribute to every daughter,
Trodding in a perfect way
Bright as morning sunlight
That shine throughout the day.
A daughter is a treasure
Never abuse
Mother of the nation
Faithful and true
 Hail, Iration Daughter
 Hail, Iration Mother
 I and I a hail, Black Woman
 Hail, Rasta Woman
Gloriful Empress Menen
Whom I and I adore
Giving Ises for protection
Giving thanks and so much more
To be humble to I sisters
Is Mama request
It is the Mother of Creation
The daughters represent
The daughters they are trodding on
As a real lioness
They refuse to be subjected
Dem is not no sex object
Well, I and I will strengthen her
To be her best
Hail to the life giver
The daughters all well blessed
 Hail, Iration Daughter
 Hail, Iration Mother
 I and I a hail, Black Woman
 Hail, Rasta Woman
She has been through many trials
What a price she has to pay
Tribulation she has conquered

And her lights never fade
Through the works of liberation
She have her part to play
Never let her be segregated
She must have her say
Hail, Iration Daughter
Hail, Iration Mother
I and I a hail...

The poetic performances by the Ites confirm several observations made by Homiak (1995) while confounding some other discourses on the nature of Rastafarianism. Homiak noted the importance of the strident discourse of the Igelic House, or Ites of Rastafari to the rest of the movement. They were engaged in intense reasonings that had in those days (early 1960's) already transformed the daily practice of more mainstream Rastas. Their poetic and a capella chanted performances were among the seeds from which Rasta "I-talk" grew, as an extension of *Ital Livivity* into the verbal discourse of everyday interactions.

In the Ion Station performances at the Supper of Rastafari, the performers display an acute awareness of issues of globalization and gender. Iney I Itofa, in the former selection, expressed a sophisticated awareness of international issues of personal mobility and global inequality. In the latter, he issues a manifesto of love and respect for Rasta women, as if refuting the popular (in academia) critique of Rastafarianism as misogynistic and essentially androcentric.

The Supper of Rastafari is part of a continuing series of demonstrations in which the I Ion Ites combine their critical rhetorical tradition with an innovated performance format, in an ambitious campaign of education and coalition building. The event described in this paper is the second in the annual "Supper of Rastafari" series, but the group organizes other benefit concerts and events, such as a program called "Drum" where they organize performances and workshops in primary (K-6) schools promoting participation in Afro-Jamaican musics. Out of this social context emerges one of the most intriguing and

seemingly contradictory alliances at play in the Supper of Rastafari: the Ion Ites' collaboration with a group of *Kumina* practitioners, the "New Creators," led by Duse Thaxter. In the next chapter, we'll explore the ways the two groups accommodate each other at this festival and the role that *Kumina* has come to play nationwide as a symbol of African heritage in Jamaica.

CHAPTER FOUR
AFRICAN-JAMAICAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AS FOLKLORE,
ENTERTAINMENT, AND IDENTITY POLITICS:
DUSE THAXTER AND THE NEW CREATORS
OF *KUMINA*

“Yu can sell mi, but yu caan buy mi.”

– From a *Kumina* t-shirt worn by Duse at the Supper of Rastafari

“The drum is a thing wa de European take away from the slave dem, cause it connect them with their self, and they no wan them know their self.”

– Ion Flames Lightnin, introducing the New Creators

As the day heated up and the Ion Ites began setting up for the show, I joined Iunty’s brother Asha and several others in cleaning up the amphitheatre. We picked up trash and raked leaves and litter while others assembled the stage and constructed the kitchen. Around noon the crew from the King of Spades sound-system started to approach readiness, and tested their equipment, playing snippets of songs. Most everyone stopped their work and gathered around for a while to greet and listen to a celebrity visitor. This “early performer” was Dr. Tony Vendryes, the host of a nationwide radio talk show and columnist for the Jamaica Gleaner. His show and his column are both titled “An Ounce of Prevention,” and are both focused on his “holistic” approach to medicine and nutrition. The crowd listened intently and responded with approval as Vendryes, in shirt sleeves, tie, and sunglasses, cited functional, scientific rationales verifying the health benefits of an Ital diet, especially for those of African ancestry. He went beyond approving of their saltless and meatless diets to expound on their need to monitor their sugar intake from overripe fruits (in relation to the danger of diabetes) and also described the importance of self-screening for prostate problems. All of these, he said were especially important concerns for this mostly male, mostly Rastafarian audience. After Dr. Vendryes had spoken to the group and departed with his worried looking entourage of driver, personal assistant, and bodyguard, I

wandered back to the now “backstage” area where Mandy and I had camped the night before.

Next to our tent lay two unfamiliar drums. Both about the same size, cylindrical, about twelve inches in diameter and twenty inches long, made from a single piece of log. I knew these were not *Nyabingi* drums from both their size and the way the heads were attached. Though skinned at only one end, like the *funde* and *kete* of the *Nyabingi* orchestra, these didn’t have the metal ring and bolt tuning mechanism of those drums. Instead, a band of vine-wood, or *wiss* wound around the drum body and was pierced by large nails angled away from the head end. This band wedged against a second band that was rolled or sewn into the edge of the drum skin. Two young boys, eight or nine years old, ran up to me as I was checking out the drums.

“You know this drum? Do you know how it goes?” One asked.

“No, what kind of drum is it? Do you know?” I replied.

“Like this,” he said, and he laid one of the drums down on its side and sat astride it, bracing his left foot off to the side and swinging his right foot around in front of the drum’s head. He began beating a rhythm, and at first it seemed similar to the double pulse of the *Nyabingi* drums, but then I realized it was much faster, and to my surprise the boy braced his heel against the skin of the head, and used it to change the pitch from one set of pulses to the next. “Bodom – bidim – bodom – bidim – bodom – bidim,” the beat undulated steadily, while the other boy picked up two sticks lying alongside the drums and clacking out an interlocking rhythm on the back of the drum on which his brother played. “Takatak – takatak – takatak – takatak – takatak,” the last of the second rhythm’s set of three strokes fell on the first stroke of the drum’s double pulse.

“But what kind of drumming is this? It’s not *Nyabingi*, is it?”

“No, man, this a *Kumina*, is a different thing, man. Here, you try it.”

I doffed my sandals and mounted the other drum, which was almost the same size as the first, but just an inch or so smaller in diameter. Again surprised, I found that this drum’s pitch was far higher than the first, in spite of their similar size and head tension. As I awkwardly tried to imitate the boys posture and motions, I found it much more difficult and the rhythm more nuanced than I supposed, and nearly fell off of the drum. Both boys erupted in raucous laughter, and began teasing me, mocking my clumsiness, taking turns pretending to fall off the drum themselves. “Him cyan do it! Haw!” We were all giggling soon but they kept trying to teach me.

The giggling stopped abruptly as an older man with short trimmed hair and a faded baseball cap turned the corner. The kids looked as though they had been caught being bad, but the man broke a wide smile as he approached, extending a friendly handshake toward me. The graphic on the front of his t-shirt showed two hands and one foot superimposed on a ring, the hands drawn so as to seem in motion and the foot in profile, braced against the ring. “Nice to meet you, my name is Duse. Here, mek me show you.” He took the boy’s place on the lower pitched drum and took up the same rhythm, yet in his hands (and foot) the drum seemed to resonate, to sing with a richer tone. “We’ll be tuning up to play in just a moment, then you’ll really feel it. Are you a student? You wan fe learn about the drum, eh?” He asked about my project and the location of my university; I knew he had my number. “I’ll help you and you’ll help me,” he said.

I had been instructed earlier by Ion Flames Lightnin not to photograph or record any performers without asking their permission. Duse beat me to the question, “You will take some pictures, won’t you? But do you have a video or a tape machine?”

I explained that my recorder was already set up, attached to the sound-control board of the sound-system, and he seemed pleased. As we spoke, another man joined us. Like Duse, he wore a cap over his short haircut, in contrast to the majority of men at the event, who wore dread-locks. He took up a claw-hammer and began tuning the drums by striking the nails which attach the band of *wiss*, while rotating the drum. I could hear the tension of the head rise as he tapped the nails, working his way around to spread the tension evenly. Midway through this process on each drum, he reached for a bottle of rum, washed his hands in it, and splashed a generous amount on the drums' heads, soaking them from edge to edge. Duse introduced him as Alton, and when he realized that I was observing him intently, he began to talk about the drums he was preparing.

“These are a set, male and female. The bass is the male, the man, the one dem call *bando*, it have skin from de ram goat. The next one is the lady, an it use a skin of the female. It's called the *repeater*, or *plain cyas*. The male skin is thicker than the lady, the lady skin is thin, that's why we use that one to make the repeater”

Duse and Alton carried the two drums out to the middle of the ampitheatre, to the grassy area in front of the stage, and laid the drums on the ground about three feet apart with their heads facing each other. They were joined by a handful of others intent on participating in the *Kumina*. Ion Flames introduced the New Creators from the stage, explaining that practitioners of *Kumina* “keep the *anciency* in a next (another) form.” In his introduction, he presented the group with great respect, while taking the opportunity to reiterate many of the themes from “Ion Flames' Warning” (see chapter three), but several times he also repeated the phrase “Nothing dead! Nothing dead can extend your life!” as if signifying against the *Kumina* practice of animal sacrifice, warning the participants to conform to his own *Ital* standards in their performance. With their colleague Cherry playing

shaka (shakers), and several members of other *Kumina* bands filling in, one playing *catta sticks* against the body of the *bando*, another playing *grater* (scraping a spoon across a coconut grater), and two more dancing and responding to the song leader as the chorus, Duse invoked the first *Kumina* songs of the day (Figure 4.1). Though my recording of this afternoon session is poor in quality, I was able to transcribe these texts from the first two numbers. Both are *bailo* songs; songs sung in mostly in Jamaican Creole, without much use of the “African Language,” in which the remainder of the *Kumina* repertoire, known as *country* is sung.



FIGURE 4.1: Alton and Duse are seated on the drums, wearing caps, and Cherry is standing, playing one *shaka*. The rest joined in but are from other *Kumina* families.

We a go deh O, we a go deh O
 We a go deh O, we a go deh O
 Slave massa call, an me wan go a mi yard, we a go deh O, we a go deh
 Slave massa call, an we wan go a Africa, we a go deh O, we a go deh
 Good morning O neighbor, good morning O
 Wha mek de bed bruk dung, morning O, neighbor, morning O
 Wha yu been a do mek de bed bruk dung, morning O, neighbor, morning O
 (chorus response: Betta sen fe de doctor!)

The brevity and simplicity of these transcriptions truly conceal the complexity of the songs as they were performed. In a call-response pattern the song leader and chorus interacted to create polyrhythmic interlocking patterns, woven into the fabric of the drums and other instruments. Through each song, as in jazz, the players moved away from the basic theme of the song, improvising across increasingly complex rhythmic combinations of played and sung phrases, until bringing the song around for a definitive restatement of the musical/lyrical text at the end. A song can be extended for as long as the players care to improvise on it, and the song leader usually signals the turn-around for the end. The players took turns calling out and leading songs, and often switched roles/instruments from one number to the next.

After their performance, the group retired to a shady spot at the edge of the amphitheatre, to rest and “cool out,” while the festival and stage show continued, awaiting their next set, which would be on stage later in the evening. Duse, Alton, and Cherry seemed to have adopted Mandy and me, and they urged us to deposit our packs close by their own little “camp” so they could ensure “protection.” Through the afternoon, Duse seemed intent on teaching me the basics about *Kumina*, a subject almost entirely new to me at the time. He was better prepared to work with me as a consultant than I was, to work with him as a researcher. He explained the basic points of *Kumina*’s cultural history, cosmology, musical instrumentation, and even volunteered a small lexicon of “African Language” vocabulary. He seemed ready to provide the kind of information he expected me to want, and I’m certainly not Duse’s first student ethnographer: months later I would find his name listed as a participant in Mark Braun’s (1995) MA thesis research on the ritual and drumming of *Kumina*. At this moment, though, I knew little about this religion, so I asked him to define *Kumina* in the most basic way he could.

“*Kumina* now, is a music, traditionally, coming from Africa, down in the Guinea Coast. It was brought here by the old ancestors, an as generation, to generation, pick it up, you know? Generation fall and generation rise, so the older generation leave it to the younger one, an the younger one grow off it. Maybe he get old an he has to leave it to a younger set. But it’s a nice music, very much good, for entertainment. Right? An it works in a spiritual way too, you know. Yeah”

“So it not just a dance music?”

“No, Iss work spiritual too, that’s what I tell you that, a sorry a couldn’t get to perform, the way is suppose to perform, so dat you could see it. Beca, it’s a music, it help to heal a sick. An it can destroy a person. Yes, it’s a serious music, yet, it is very nice when you’re playing it just as entertainment. Just for entertainment it is nice, but it’s a serious music. That’s what I’m trying to show you now: We use it an do other different work, but, at the moment we are using it as entertainment, we are doing as a entertainment for people right now. But if we happen to do this in a different form or way, maybe it’s to help a sick, to get him better, beca him get sick an you want him to get better, spiritually. So we play this to get him better. But at that form, at that time at least, you has to set up certain type of, powers. You know what I mean, ‘powers?’ Powers now, is a ritual, you set up a order, you set a spiritual order.”

“In preparation for the performance? How do you prepare the place?”

“Well, depends on what happen to that person that you’re going to look about. Maybe it’s a spirit, upon him; a evil spirit is upon him. So if it’s a evil spirit that’s upon him and you want to clear that spirit, you have to get the things, to destroy the spirit.”

“How do you know what to do?”

“Yes, that is the greatest thing, you have to know, what to do, and you have to know, when you go to the drug store, that is the doctor shop, what to buy, to perform your duty. We generally use candle, and different type of incense. Maybe you have use a King Solomon oil or some Chinese wash, you understand? Yeah but you have to know, what to do, to perform. So when we are performing now, in those type of performance, we use this type of music, but, for entertainment, we don’t have to set nothing, we don’t have to do anything out of the way. You just come and put down your drum, and you entertain the people.”

“You told me you sometimes lay out washed banana leaves, what do you do with those?”

“That’s what I was telling you about just now, when you’re going to do certain works, you have to prepare the banana leaf. That is why I say, a sorry you don’t get to see, the work. The family, your family is of about ten, and when you’re performing the works, you’re gwan set the leaf, in a circle, like this, and you put the food on the leaf, right around, and each family go around it, and you have to use your finger, eat the food; no fork, no spoon, just your hand, and eat the food. You don’t have to eat the whole of it, just partake of it”.

“And you’re drumming in the midst of that?”

“In the midst of that you’re drumming, because that is where the spirit, going to come in, to heal the sick.”

Mandy, who had been working on her notes nearby, joined in and asked, “Is the food offering animal, is it meat?”

“Good food, rice, you can use meat, but, hear now, you don’t put no salt. It has to be cook in fresh, fresh food. You can use goat, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. The goat is a thing, it has to take one chop. You take your machete, one chop, cut off the head. The

head fly deh so, the body fly deh so. An you get that blood now, into the basin, with the white rum. You mix it up, with the incense or the oil that you're gwa to use on the sick, and you bath him with it. You call that a blood bath. You got to know that, It's a heavy ritual. It's not so simple as, you would see it. If I should perform it in the proper way, you would love it. You would love to see it. And it does real healing."

This kind of healing in the midst of the Supper of Rastafari would not be acceptable. Yet throughout the festival and especially during the later evening performance by the New Creators (see Figure 4.2), *Kumina* Priestesses, Mama Lilly and Sister Glory, dispensed treatments as the *Kumina* band played. They administered noni juice and bitters and washed some patients' heads and feet with rum or spring water, but eschewed any kind of animal sacrifice. They made other accommodations to the situation, showing flexibility even in the texts of the songs. For instance, in their later performance, I heard another version of the "Good Morning" song transcribed above. This time, perhaps in response to the admonitions of their hosts, the sexual innuendo of the line "*W'ba mek the bed bruk dung?*" (How did you break the bed?) was replaced with text more consonant with the theme of the event, sung over the same tune.

Good morning O mi people, morning O
Good morning O bongo pickney, good morning O
We all are one nation, morning O
We all are one, mek me tell you, good morning O
O nation, O nation O, morning O
Peace and love we a deal with, good morning O
Good morning yetowayet (friends) O, morning O

Political Economy of *Kumina*

So *Kumina* is a religion, a music, and a social movement limited to a set of family lineages from the parish of St. Thomas in the East of Jamaica. During the months after my first encounters with Duse, back in the library, I discovered that anthropologists and

folklorists have been studying, or at least *writing about*, *Kumina* for most of the 20th century.

Some authors have implied a Maroon connection, others suggested *Kumina* came from direct Ashanti, Yoruba, or Dahomey antecedents.



FIGURE 4.2: Duse and Alton on drums, while Cherry plays the grater.

Though Edward Seaga suggested a central African origin as early as the 1950's (1956:4), consensus on that issue only emerged in the 1980's, after the publication of articles by Warner-Lewis (1977), Brathwaite (1978), each of which analyzed the same set of interviews with famous *Kumina* Mother Queenie Kennedy. Bilby and Bunseki's (1983) extensive cross-Atlantic comparisons between the "African" language used in *Kumina* and the present day Kikongo and Kimbundu languages seem to have proven the tie to between the families of the *Kumina* tradition and post-emancipation émigrés from central Africa.

Monica Schuler's (1980) social history of that epoch in Jamaica's history, from 1835-1865, confirms that *Kumina* is a West-Central African religion, brought to Jamaica by free émigrés where it flourished among and alongside the already diverse world of Afro-Jamaican musical and religious traditions. Alongside the various drumming rituals of the Leeward and Windward Maroons, the antisocial, sorcery practice of *obeah*, the social, healing practice of *myalism*, and the popular practices of funerary and entertainment music among Afro-Jamaicans in general, practicing *Kumina* helped the *Bongo Nation* organize and survive the ecological and epidemiological disasters of the late 19th century. Schuler points to important questions like (1980:9): did post-emancipation émigrés link up with their compatriots who were former slaves? Particularly relevant here is question of the links between *Kumina* and the Maroons.

Duse, being from a *Kumina* family, also has blood kinship ties to Moore Town and the Windward Maroons, as do many people in the area of St Thomas and Portland parishes. I saw among the Leeward Maroons that in living memory burial grounds were segregated by ethnic origin, with the "Congo" area separate from both the "Old Town" site of Kojo's grave (and presumably other "Kromanti" ancestors) and separate from the Christian cemetery next to the church in town. If some Windward Maroons also held strong identification with the

Congo area, that might foster social and even familial interaction between them and the *Bongo Nation* of *Kumina* participants. Another fascinating wrinkle in this *Kumina*-Maroon connection emerges from Schuler's historical data that indicate some of the voluntary émigrés from the British colony of Sierra Leone were in fact the children and grandchildren of exiled Leeward Maroons who had been transported to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone in the wake of the uprising of Leeward Maroons known as "Tacky's Rebellion," in 1760 (Burton 1997:25; Alleyne 1988:42-43). In spite of broad impact of these 19th century African immigrants to Jamaica, Schuler (1980:9) finds that

Of the various groups represented among the immigrants, only the Central Africans, concentrated in St. Thomas-in-the-East, and to a lesser extent the Yoruba of Westmoreland, achieved a long-lived, viable society. Numerical superiority and regional clustering during indenture seem to have been the crucial factors in this cultural-communal longevity.

Olive Lewin (2000:215-219) reviews the earlier debate and the consensus about *Kumina*'s origins that emerged in the 1980's, primarily due to linguistic investigations of the texts of "country" *Kumina* songs. Her own definition of *Kumina* reveals her uneasiness with that conclusion of exclusively Congo provenience: "Kumina is a cult rooted in beliefs and practices brought to Jamaica perhaps by slaves and certainly by immigrants from Central Africa" (215). Perhaps this reluctance comes from her four decades of study and participation in Jamaican traditional music; she might know of *Kumina* followers who, like in Duse's above citation of "Guinea Coast," make other claims about their religion's origins. She speaks from a position of authority and influence as a folklorist, having been appointed "Folk Music Research Officer" in 1966 by Edward Seaga, who was then Minister of Development and Welfare, and also at that time assigned to a post created for her in the Jamaica School of Music. From this position she has played vital roles in the Jamaica Folk Singers, the National Theater Dance Company (*NTDC*), the National Festival of Arts, and

Jamaica's annual Independence Day celebrations (Lewin 2000:13-23,271). With the Jamaica Festival of Arts, begun in 1963 (the year after independence), the new nation set out to expose the Jamaica to their own national arts and culture, of which many were not at the time aware.

The Minister responsible for culture and the arts, Edward Seaga, was not only deeply interested but understood *the importance of these largely intangible assets to an emerging nation*...His own social environment had also given him first-hand knowledge of the level of ignorance among "educated" Jamaicans regarding their musical heritage (Lewin 2000:50, emphasis added).

Deborah Thomas discusses this approach to folklore as nation-building in her writings about the political oppositions behind the performances of the NTDC (2002a), and contemporary, countervailing ideas of Jamaica's national identity in their folk arts and popular culture (2002b). Since national independence, *Kumina* has been promoted as an emblem of Jamaican identity, in part through the cultural policies put in place by "multiracial creole nationalist" architects of Jamaica's state in the early 1960s, including Seaga, who later became prime minister. These creole nationalists initially invoked a 19th century concept of "folk" blackness based in valuing the peasant lifestyle, religious reform, and independence through land ownership. In practice, however, their cultural policies selectively supported practices seen as reaffirming the value of creolized, uniquely local practices; they "deflected active relationships to contemporary struggles in Africa, actively contained attempts to mobilize along class or racial lines, and emphasized social and economic reform," while eschewing any kind of radicalism (Thomas 2002b:37).

The cultural policy conceived by creole nationalists like Seaga at the time of independence was to select from among the African-Jamaican cultural and musical practices those that supported the creole nationalist idea of progress and class ideology by using middle-class political and cultural brokers to promote middle class values among the

working class and peasant people (Thomas 1999:503,505). Later, the People's National Party (*PNP*) government led by Michael Manley (1972-1980) ushered in a period of democratic socialism, and

In the increased atmosphere of international racial and feminist consciousness spurred by the independence movements in Africa, the U.S. Civil Rights and Black Power movements, the increasing visibility of Rastafari through the growing popularity of reggae music, and the United Nations 1975 initiation of the Decade for Women, Jamaicans were able to, even encouraged to, organize for a local development around identities that did not have local boundaries – as workers, as black people, as women (Thomas 1999:508-509).

When Seaga and the Jamaican Labour Party (*JLP*) came back to power in 1980, they reversed many the policies of the *PNP*, aligning Jamaica with the U.S. and the Reagan administration, and drastically changed economic policy. The social, cultural, and public welfare programs put in place by the *PNP* were slashed, and the aftermath of these “structural adjustments” was not only an increase in poverty and migration, but also “a quiet ridiculing and denigration of blackness” (Thomas 1999:510). This political shift coincides with the turn away from internationalist *roots* reggae toward the locally focused dancehall music in Jamaican popular culture at this time (Stolzoff 2000:99-102). Manley had appropriated reggae music and Rastafarianism as national treasures, and had presented himself as a representative of the suffering poor, yet he and his party was perceived to have failed miserably. These and other developments set the stage, in the dancehalls of downtown Kingston, for the emergence and elaboration of a musical style that refused exportation and appropriation, rooted in a radical politics of blackness and poverty that no elite creole politician would dare to steal for his own.

The shifting political times in late 20th century Jamaica, and the resulting shifts in cultural policies, echo those that took place in some of the newly independent West African socialist states over the same general period. They initially instituted national cultural

policies that provided patronage for musicians and dancers, as part of nation building projects. Out of the creative pressure on musicians and other performers to adapt formerly local, ethnically circumscribed, practices to the new social and artistic contexts of performance in the nation of Mali, new instrument technologies emerged, and the musics and artists promoted as part of the national identity garnered international acclaim (Polak 2000:9-13), through the medium of nationalized performance competitions, and international promotional concert tours. Such policies can create ambivalent outcomes in the lives of the performers whose words, sounds, and movements the state co-opts in its nation-building project. Since Mali discontinued its cultural programs in structural adjustments after a governmental change in 1991, many of its great drummers and dancers have emigrated to Europe or North America in order to continue their performance careers, while other performers have contributed to a revitalized local, urban, grass-roots professional entertainment scene, where music is required for weddings, circumcisions, birthdays, and funerals.

Though *Kumina* has been appropriated as folklore by the government, as a symbol of Jamaican identity, and interpreted by others as an artifact of Jamaica's ties to the African Diaspora, it remains a family religion of a segment of the population of St Thomas Parish, and a popular form of entertainment among those same folks. At the turn of the 21st century, the government's official policies still promote the traditional arts, culture, and folklore of Jamaicans, though the terms of that support have shifted with changing political and economic times. The policy of the current *PNP* administration attempts to foster not only an awareness of Jamaica within the African diaspora, but also Jamaica as the origin of its own diaspora, and moves to strengthen ties to Jamaican communities abroad in North America and Europe. In the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Culture's draft of national

cultural policy, entitled “Toward Jamaica the Cultural Superstate,” the government sets out a plan of nation building through fostering a sense of Jamaican identity among Jamaicans at home, and also to revitalize that identity among Jamaicans abroad and their descendants in an effort they call “counter-colonization” (Jamaica 2002:8). Unfortunately, this development, or progress, is set out in terms of enhancing Jamaica as a tourist destination, and the cultural diversity of Jamaica is called upon to serve this purpose, as recognized in section 7.4, entitled “Cultural Diversity,” position D:

In this regard, the Government of Jamaica will: seek to foster and promote opportunities for full expression of Jamaica’s vibrant grassroots culture, recognizing the contribution of this sector to the dynamic Jamaican product that we now boast (Jamaica 2002:10).

This “Jamaican product” is the nation’s people, its landscape, and its cultural heritage. For all of the talk in the document of empowering Jamaicans to develop their crafts, performances, and expressive language practices, the words used reveal a reduction of the people’s humanity to a product to be bought and sold. The outcome of this relatively new version of the cultural policy in Duse’s life seems ambivalent. He moved to Montego Bay from his rural home in St. Thomas to work as a *Kumina* performer. Despite the fact that *Kumina* is not traditional in the western side of the island, there seemed to be enough demand. Between the resorts, the government sponsored gig playing at the gate at the airport, and odd jobs, Duse made the move, bringing several colleagues with him. Gradually, living far from home took its toll on the *family*; some moved back East, and one long-time drummer passed away after my last visit, making Duse’s task of leading the group more difficult than ever.

Mandy and I flew to Montego Bay, on January 3, 2003, to meet with Duse and travel with him and the band up to Accompong Town, where the New Creators were to perform at the Maroon Heritage Festival. Duse arrived to pick us up with I-stan Ion, in I-stan’s old

(and very loud) Lada. Ladas are the Eastern European sedans that were used as taxis in Jamaica before the introduction of the now ubiquitous Toyota Corolla station wagon. After a stop at the grocery store, where I bought beer and food to cook for the night ahead, I-stan brought us out to Guava Walk and as far up the hill as his car would go. A little farther up we found Duse's home and made camp in his yard. By the time we had collected white rum, drums, and enough people to play, the soup was ready, so we all ate before finally setting down the drums on an area of hard-packed dirt next to a neighbor's front gate.

The group kept a small kerosene lantern, made from a tin can, between the drums, along with a cup full of fresh water, a bottle of grape soda, and the rum bottle (see Figure 4.3), from which the drummers bathed the drums, their hands, and their faces much more copiously than I remembered from the Supper of Rastafari performances. While neither occasion represented a fully set-up, serious, ritual, this setting was probably closer to home for the group, who might be playing on this same spot for their own entertainment on any other given Friday evening anyway. Since my previous visit I had found a wealth of information on *Kumina*, including Duse's appearance in Mark Braun's thesis (1995), and many of the studies in which Queenie Kennedy participated.

Another MA thesis related to *Kumina* is Susan Kelley Moore's (1988) study of *Kumina* "country" discourse in the 1950's. Analyzing tapes recorded in the 1950's by her grandfather, J. G. Moore, she comes to the conclusion that the country songs and *Kumina* rituals themselves are the key to the survival of the African language unique to the *Bongo Nation*. She did no fieldwork, but instead took the old tapes and did discourse analysis of J. G. Moore's taped conversations with and elicitation from *Kumina* practitioners. In her analysis, she declared that the language elicited from the informants is "all but dead," based on her assessment of their use of a relatively limited vocabulary and syntax, and on their apparent

willingness to composite new words out of old ones when their vocabulary lacks a word or phrase they need. Further, she found the interviewees were unable to provide English or creole translations of much of the vocabulary used in the country songs, concluding that either they didn't want to tell what the songs meant, or that they didn't know those meanings. While I agree that music and ritual are the keys to the survival of the religion and language of the *Bongo Nation*, I am skeptical of S. K. Moore's description of intrusion by the creole language causing a linguistic death for *country* (Moore 1988:41).



FIGURE 4.3: Duse plays shakas, while Alton plays catta sticks, unknown drummers.

The lives of the Bongo ancestors were not easy, but they and many their children have carried on worshipping and entertaining themselves using Congo African songs and rituals because they are *Africans*, unequivocally. As a *science man*, a *doctor*, a *Kumina daddy*, Duse fits into the social institution of *Kumina* as an organizer, a co-leader of a small band of musicians, a *family*. Duse's situation is unusual in that he has brought his family far from

their home, for an out of place reason: to work performing *Kumina* for tourists visiting an area where, traditionally, there is no *Kumina*, an area that happens to be rich in its own music and performance traditions. Duse told me they perform regularly, but not enough to make a living, and being away from their homes and families is the most difficult part of their work.

When we awoke the next morning around six, we discovered that everyone but Duse had already departed for Accompong Town, leaving long before sunrise to catch a ride with someone they knew who was also going to set up and vend at the festival. Traveling by route taxi Duse, Mandy, and I arrived there just before noon. By the time Mandy and I had set up our tent, I heard the New creators call out their first song across the valley at the Bickle Village stage. Then the rains came, driving the small crowds either indoors or out of town. When I went around to Bickle after the rain, Duse and the band were relaxing on the benches in the covered audience area. Obviously disappointed with the attendance and their reception by their hosts, they announced that they would travel back home before nightfall, because they hadn't been able to find a place to stay the night.

Months later I sent Duse a stack of CD copies of the recordings I made of their session on Guava Walk, and in the package I included a photocopy of Braun's thesis. When I spoke to him about it he said that the recording sounded great, and that he had given a copy to the owner of the local rum-shop, who was playing it non-stop at the store. He appreciated the copy of the thesis, not only because his name appeared in it, but also for the lists Braun compiled of the names of many of Duse's relatives and ancestors. With it he was reminded of stories and songs he hadn't told or sung lately. I wonder if he noticed, behind the listing of transcribed songs in the back, the computer generated graphs in appendix C (1995:122), "spectrogram results from acoustic analysis" of the individual strokes of the lead drum, the *cyas*. These are similar to graphs that appear in the last chapter of S. K. Moores

thesis (1988). She used her graphs to show that the chorus and cyas used parallel rhythms, although I can't see how the graphs did it any better than a subjective description would have. Why is this interaction significant? Isn't this a basic feature of all musics? Using the technology, she was able to limit her analysis to only thirteen seconds of a single song. If she had gone on to listen to more *Kumina* music, and analyzed it using more subtle and refined instruments like her own ears and mind, she could have delved more deeply into the complex structure of the interactions which she, crudely identified using the computer. On this matter, I think both S. K. Moore and Braun are stretching for an excuse to include the very technical-looking computer generated graphics in their theses, but only Moore goes so far as to attempt to draw conclusions from them.

I doubt it matters either way to Duse, who appreciates the recognition, but wishes it translated into practical help. After the anthropologist has gone, and the tourist product developers lose interest, it is up to Duse to survive. He gets as far as he can on his music and doctor work, and he also does odd jobs, shoe repair, and he even sometimes works as a street sweeper downtown. He intends to play as much as he can, and teach, he's been collaborating with the Ion Ites on their "Drum" project, an effort to bring educational cultural performances to schoolchildren around Jamaica. He also hopes that, perhaps with my help, he'll be able to bring a band to play and teach at music festivals or cultural events here in the U.S. That ambition was certainly echoed by all of my consultants on this project: they all hope to travel abroad to perform and teach others about African Jamaican culture.

Duse's situation illustrates some of the problems and contradictions erupting from interaction between the government's nation building project, and the ups and downs of Jamaica's tourism-dependent economy. Duse adapts to the situation by collaborating with Rastafarian activists, tourists, and scholars, and the local government, more or less keeping

his group together and, in spite of material hardship, striving to teach an awareness of African cultural heritage to the younger generations of Jamaicans. In spite of the government policy's pluralistic embrace of all traditions, arts, and crafts practiced by Jamaicans, it remains fundamentally flawed in that they conceive of the people and their art as a "product," (e.g "high quality Jamaican product") something to be promoted, priced as a commodity, and then sold to the world *a foreign*.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

I've used analysis drawn from anthropology, ethnomusicology, cultural studies, history, and Jamaica's public policy, to justify my own program of ethnographic fieldwork. But what kind of truth have I succeeded in telling? I wanted to reveal something about the lives of people living in Jamaica, by telling about how they participate in music, and what they say in and about their music and themselves. One thing all my consultants have in common is that they use musics that have religious roots, to achieve the goals of teaching and entertaining that reach beyond religious ritual or evangelism. Though none of them expect to make a living on music alone, they all integrate music into their livelihoods; like many of Jamaica's "culture bearers," my consultants are relatively poor, and in the midst of struggling to make ends meet, would not be able to afford to carry on with an art that held no hope of at least paying for itself.

As more and more Jamaicans participate in globalized economic relationships, a few groups work to promote their own political and cultural alternatives. Sometimes they accomplish this by supporting music and festival at the grass-roots scale, and participating in the grass-roots social organizations that produce local musical events. Some of my consultants seemed to be moved by a sense that international commercialism is encroaching on their collective national and local identities. In reaction, they reach out to the youth, and to others in their communities, encouraging the performance of cultural identity in many every way, knowing that only the practices that the people support and esteem will survive to be valued and learned by future young people. I see George, Duse, Iunty, and their associates as cultural activists pursuing projects of mental decolonization. Through social networking and poetic alliance, each works at teaching about African culture and history in Jamaica, in the *dancehall*, at the folklore festival, in the airport, in the *yard*, and on the street,

but certainly not to the erasure of ethnic difference! Each group keeps and protects its own traditions: Maroons keep secret rites, even in the midst of their public festival, *Kumina* only reveals its deepest secrets in African language long after midnight, and Rastafarians' *Nyabingi* must stay pure of all unwholesomeness, including *myalism*, popular culture, and capitalism. But each group extends, adapts, and incorporates sacred elements into its performances in new secular contexts, interpreting and representing the sacred for audiences outside of their traditional congregations.

And what about all those “zones,” “borders,” and “limens,” I talked about in the introduction while theorizing about the dynamics of creolization? If the overall field is the spectrum of Jamaican national identity as represented by public culture, then what would be the relevant axes of such a model? One axis might be the “acrolectal-basilectal” spectrum parallel to that used by linguists, but is that the only dimension? Surely not, since it would be problematic to try to quantify or qualify one of the groups in this study as more or less African than any other. So, when generalizations fail, we must resort to specifics, in this case histories, geographies, and cultural political narratives. Creolization happens as a locally predominant feature of culture change, where groups exchange ideas and members if their ideological and political goals are compatible. I had assumed that if groups can get along socially, especially if they could innovate a performance context to share, and especially if there were some political or economic motivation as well, greater exchange would occur. Observation showed a more complex discursive process than expected. It seems that even though performers work to accommodate each other and the performance situation, and many performers maintain dual or multiple memberships, participating in different and apparently dissonant traditions, I don't see anything I could describe as merely mixing. Groups may interact, collaborate, and even self-consciously or playfully borrow, but people

are never passive, sloppy, or arbitrary in any of these choices. And the more difficult a group's situation, the more selective and radically transformative their cultural and linguistic appropriations seem to become. No group ever intentionally participates in ritual or music that erodes its identity, or that weakens its claim to exist, just as no individual participates in music or ritual with the intention of weakening his claim to belonging, the intention to alienate himself. Individuals and groups express themselves as social and political beings through the organization and performance of public entertainment.

One potential avenue for future research might be public folklore: engagement with public "cultural performances," both in and out of institutional frameworks, and more active participation in helping performers achieve their goals of performing abroad in North America and Europe. Folkloric performances provide economic opportunities for the performers featured in this study, but always require accommodation to the performance context, and sometimes, to the host. Thus they become potential sites of both innovation and exploitation. How can interested outsiders be introduced to the music and ritual in ways that are acceptable to the insiders? How can performing artists maintain autonomy and control of their productions, while reaching larger audiences and securing fair economic compensation?

In future research I will build on the relationships I established during this project, spending a longer more intensive period of engagement with either Iunty or Duse, working toward a more apprentice-like working relationship with Duse (either in Montego Bay or in St. Thomas, or collaborating with Iunty, Ites International, and the Ion Ites, facilitating recordings and festivals. Both of these represent opportunities to reciprocate toward my consultants in practical and economic ways. With Iunty I would live in Malverne, and establish a deeper knowledge of the social organizations behind dancehall parties, especially

local sound-systems and the competitive frameworks like the “round-robin family.”

Following Iunty’s movements to the Montego Bay area, I would make a more extended engagement with the Ion Ites.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, L. Emelie and Llewelyn Adams
1991 Understanding Jamaican Patois: An Introduction to Afro-Jamaican Grammar. Kingston, JA: L.M.H. Publishing.
- Agorsah, E. Kofi
1994 Archaeology of Maroon Settlements in Jamaica. *In* Maroon Heritage: Archaeological, Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives. E. Kofi Agorsah, ed. Kingston, JA: Canoe Press.
1999 Ethnoarchaeological Consideration of Social Relationship and Settlement Patterning Among Africans in the Caribbean Diaspora. *In* African Sites Archaeology in the Caribbean. Jay B. Haviser, ed. Pp. 38-64. Kingston, JA: Ian Randle.
- Alleyne, Mervyn
1985 A Linguistic Perspective on the Caribbean. *In* Caribbean Contours. Sydney W. Mintz and Sally Price, eds. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
1988 Roots of Jamaican Culture. London: Pluto Press.
- Badu, Erykah
2000 Bag Lady (instrumental). Detroit, MI: Motown Records.
- Barker, David and David J. Miller
1995 Farming on the Fringe: Small-Scale Agriculture on the Edge of the Cockpit Country. *In* Environment and development in the Caribbean: Geographical Perspectives. David Barker and Duncan F. M. McGregor, eds. Kingston: The Press, The University of the West Indies.
- Bilby, Kenneth
1975 Moore town: Capital of Earth (video)
1981 Music of the Maroons of Jamaica. (sound recording and liner notes) Folkways FE 4027.
1985 The Caribbean as a Musical region. *In* Caribbean Contours. Sydney W. Mintz and Sally Price, eds. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
1995 Jamaica. *In* Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae. Peter Manuel, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
1999 Neither Here Nor There: The Place of "Community" in the Jamaican Religious Imagination. *In* Religion, Diaspora, and Cultural Identity: A reader in the Anglophone Caribbean. John W. Pulsis, ed. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers.
- Bilby, Kenneth and Fu-Kiau kia Bunseki
1983 Kumina: A Congo Based Tradition in the New World. Brussels: Les Cahiers du CEDAF 4: Linguistique.
- Brathwaite, Edward
1971 The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Brathwaite, Kamau
1978 Kumina: An African Survival in Jamaica. *In* Jamaica Journal 42:44-63.
- Braun, Mark
1995 The Drumming of Kumina: Musical Form and Ritual Structure. MA Thesis
- Wesleyan University: Middletown, Connecticut
- Burton, Richard D.
1997 Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean. Ithaca, NY:
Cornell University Press.
- Caribbean-On-Line
2004 Jamaica. Electronic document (map), <http://www.caribbean-on-line.com/jm/jmmap.shtml>, last accessed on April 26, 2004.
- Chevannes, Barry
1994 Rastafari: Roots and Ideology. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Cooper, Carolyn
1995 Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican
Popular Culture. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Dje Dje, Jacqueline Cogdell
1998 Remembering Kojo: History, Music, and Gender in the January Sixth
Celebration of the Jamaican Accompong Maroons. *In* Black Music Research Journal
18(1-2):67-120.
- Dunham, Katherine
1946 Journey to Accompong. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Hall, Douglas
1989 In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-86. London:
Macmillan.
- Harrington, Anne
2000 Thinking About Trance over a Century: The Making of a Set of Impasses. *In*
Trance Passages: a Hypermedia, Multidisciplinary Guide. John Lester, ed. A section
of the website published by Harvard University's Mind/Brain/Body Interfaculty
Initiative. Electronic document <http://mbb.harvard.edu/trance2/> last accessed on
November 25, 2002.
- Harrison, Faye
1988 The Politics of Social Outlawry in Urban Jamaica. *In* Urban Anthropology
17(2-3):259-277.
- Hawkins, Michael

- 1999 Tourism and Place in Treasure Beach, Jamaica: Imagining Paradise and the Alternative. PhD Dissertation – Louisiana State University: Baton Rouge, LA.
- Homiak, John
 1995 Dub History: Soundings on Rastafari Livity and Language. *In* Rastafari and other African-Caribbean Worldviews. Barry Chevannes, ed. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Hurston, Zora Neal
 1938 Tell My Horse: Voodoo and life in Haiti and Jamaica. New York: Harper and Rowe.
- Jamaica, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Culture, Culture Division
 2002 Toward Jamaica the Cultural Superstate: The (Draft) National Cultural Policy of Jamaica. Electronic document, <http://www.moec.gov.jm/culture/CulturalSuperstate.pdf>, last accessed January 20, 2004.
- The Jamaica Observer
 2001 Accompong Prepares for its Annual January Celebrations. The Jamaica Observer: Thursday, December 27, 2001. Last accessed at URL <http://jamaicaobserver.com> on October 29, 2002.
- Kopytoff, Barbara
 1976 The Development of Jamaican Maroon Ethnicity. *In* Caribbean Quarterly 22(2-3):33-50.
- Lewin, Olive
 2000 Rock It Come Over: The Folk Music of Jamaica. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Limon, Jose
 1994 Dancing With the Devil: society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican American South Texas. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, WI.
- Metellus, Jean
 1998 The Process of Creolization in Haiti and the Pitfalls of the Graphic Form. *In* Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity. Kathleen M. Balutanski and Marie-Agnes Soireau, eds. Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida.
- Mintz, Sydney W.
 1958 Historical Sociology of the Jamaican Church-Founded free Village System. *De West-Indische Gids* 38(1-2):46-70.
- Mintz, Sydney W. and Richard Price

- 1976 *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective*. ISHI Occasional Papers on Social Change, 2. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Moore, Joseph G. and George E. Simpson
 1957 *A Comparative Study of Acculturation in Morant Bay and West Kingston, Jamaica*. Abstract of Zaire, numbers 9 and 10.
 1958 *A Comparative Study of Acculturation in Morant Bay and West Kingston, Jamaica (Conclusion)*. Abstract of Zaire, number 1.
- Moore, Susan Kelly
 1988 *Kumina Country Discourse in the 1950's*. MA Thesis – University of Texas: Austin, Texas.
- Nagashima, Yoshiko
 1984 *Rastafarian Music in Contemporary Jamaica: A Study of Socioreligious Music of the Rastafarian Movement in Jamaica*. Performance and Culture, 3. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures in Asia and Africa.
- Polak, Rainer
 2000 *A Musical Instrument travels Around the World: Jenbe Playing in Bamako, West Africa, and Beyond*. In *The World of Music* 42(3):7-46.
- Pollard, Velma
 1983 *The Social History of Dread Talk*. In *Studies in Caribbean Language*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: Society for Caribbean Linguistics.
- Reckord, Verena
 1998 *From Burru Drums to Reggae Riddims: The Evolution of Rasta Music*. In *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane, eds. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Richardson, Miles
 1990 *Cry Lonesome and Other Accounts of the Anthropologist's Project*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato
 1989 *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schuler, Monica
 1980 *"Alas, Alas, Kongo": A Social History of Indentured African Immigration Into Jamaica, 1841-1865*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Seaga, Edward
 1956 *Folk Music of Jamaica*. Ethnic Folkways Library album FE 4453 (sound recording and notes). New York: Folkways Records and Service Corporation.

- Simpson, George E.
 1998 Personal Reflections on Rastafari in West Kingston in the 1950s. *In* Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane, eds. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Slocum, Karla and Deborah Thomas
 2003 Rethinking Global and Area Studies: Insights from Caribbeanist Anthropology. *In* American Anthropologist 105(3):553-565.
- Sly and Robbie (The Taxi Gang)
 1986 Peter Gunn. London: Radio Electro Mango, Taxi Productions, Island Records.
- Stolzoff, Norman C.
 2000 Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Thomas, Deborah
 1999 Emancipating the Nation (Again): Notes on Nationalism, "Modernization," and other Dilemmas in Post-Colonial Jamaica. *In* Identities 5(4):501-542.
 2002a Democratizing Dance: Institutional Transformation and Hegemonic Re-Ordering in Postcolonial Jamaica. *In* Cultural Anthropology 17(4):512-550.
 2002b Modern Blackness: "What We Are and What We Hope to Be." *In* Small Axe 12:25-48.
- Tourism Product Development Company
 2000 About Us. Electronic document, http://www.tpdco.org/about_us.asp, last accessed April 26, 2004.
- Turner, Teresa and Brian Ferguson
 1994 Arise! Ye Mighty People!: Gender, Class & Race in Popular Struggles. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Turner, Victor
 1985 On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience. Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Warner-Lewis, Maureen
 1977 The Nkuyu: Spirit Messengers of the Kumina. *In* Savacou 13:57-78.
- Webster, Jane
 2001 Creolizing the Roman Provinces. *In* American Journal of Archaeology 105:209-225.
- Wolf, Eric R.
 1955 Types of Latin American Peasantry: A Preliminary Discussion. *In* American Anthropologist 57(3):452-471.

Yelvington, Kevin

1994 The Politics of Representing the African Diaspora in the Caribbean. *Review of Roots of Jamaican Culture* by Mervyn C. Alleyne *and* *Guineas Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidadian Culture* by Maureen Warner-Lewis. *In New West Indian Guide* 68(3-4):301-308.

Zips, Werner (translated from German by Shelley Frisch)

1999 *Black Rebels: African-caribbean Freedom Fighters in Jamaica*. Shelley Frisch, trans. Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

Throughout this text I italicized words from Jamaican-English, and in this glossary I hope to give the reader an explanation of that vocabulary. For the most part, this glossary is derived from my own experiences and field notes, and so contains only a few citations.

Abeng – The sacred horn of the Maroons, used by both Leeward and Windward Maroons. Symbolizes Maroon heritage and military prowess. Used in long distance communication, especially in case of emergency or death, also in funerary ritual and festival. Made from a cow's horn, with the tip removed, and a small square hole cut in the concave side of the narrow end of the horn. The player buzzes through the side hole, and changes the pitch by covering the hole in the end, making a rhythmic, two-note, song that is said to contain encoded speech in the ancient language of the early Maroons.

Anciency – Rastafarian idea, a quality of being connected to being connected to or informed by ancient or biblical wisdom

Babylon – Rastafarian idea, biblically derived, sum of oppression, exploitation, brutality, imperialism, the worst side of human nature, slave masters, kidnappers, those who would hold Isreal, the lamb of god in bondage. Often used as though it were a reified being (“Babylon doesn’t want us to be free”) or as an adjective (“I quit my babylon job”).

Bailo – A type of Kumina song, a style of Kumina. Any particular Kumina song with lyrics sung mostly in Jamaican-English creole, or patois. These songs are played early in the evening, or when outsiders are present, and they are considered less serious because they do not invoke possessing spirits.

Bando – The one of the two drums of Kumina. Of the man-woman set, the bando is the male drum. Made of a large hollowed log, with wiss-and-nail head binding, and a single head made from the skin of a male goat.

Bobo, Bobo Ashanti – Rastafarian sect associated with a commune near the village of Bull Bay, nine miles east of Kingston. Followers of a prophet called Prince Emanuel. Discernable from other Rastafarians by their tightly wrapped turbans and crisply pressed hand-made clothes. Also known as manufacturers of brooms.

Bongo Nation – All practitioners of Kumina, especially those related by blood to the several families of central African “indentured workers” who arrived in St. Thomas Parish between 1835 and 1850.

Burru – A Jamaican folk drumming style associated with field labor and with Jonkonnu celebrations at Christmas time. Burru drums and perhaps musical style were adopted by some urban Kumina practitioners in the early 1950’s, and were also incorporated into the Rastafarian Nyabingi drumming which emerged at that time.

Catta sticks – Heavy sticks used in Kumina. Player sits behind one of the drums and taps out a steady cadence which is an essential part of the music. Catta stick player is usually male, and often takes a turn as a drummer.

Chalice – Ganja pipe used by Rastafarians. Usually refers to a large, ceremonial pipe equipped with water filtration, and passed from one worshiper to another. This is in contrast to the more everyday practice among some Rastafarians of smoking spliffs of ganja, which are never passed around casually.

Cock-pit – Geological formation characteristic of the highlands of western-central Jamaica, resulting from high rainfall and relatively level limestone bedrock. The resulting topography of steep conical pits with rubble and caves in their bottoms and separated by winding, rocky ridges, helped the ancestors of the Leeward Maroons to hold out for more than fifty years against British efforts to kill or capture them.

Combsome – Rastafarian sect, once dominant in the movement (before 1950's) but now overshadowed by the dominant dread-locks wearing groups, exemplified by the Nyabingi House and the Youth Black Faith.

Country – A type of Kumina song, a style of Kumina Music. Sung in “African Language,” and calculated to invoke the spirits (From three classes of “Zambis”: sky-bound, earth-bound, and ancestral spirits) in the more “serious” part of the ritual, usually long after midnight.

Cyas, Plain Cyas – One of the two-drum set used in Kumina. Of the male-female pair, this is the female, the one with the highest, most cutting pitch. Over the almost invariant music of the other four musicians, this drum improvises syncopations from a repertoire of rhythms associated with particular spirits. Only the best and most experienced drummers are allowed to play cyas, as they are responsible for calling the possessing spirits, a critical function of the Kumina ritual.

Dancehall – Jamaican popular music style. Currently characterized by electronically generated musical tracks, remixed by a “selecta.” Sometimes features live vocal performance by a “deejay.”

Dancehall queens – Flamboyant ladies who create and model their own fashions in the dancehall clubs of Kingston, often organizing themselves into “modeling crews.”

Deejay – Vocal performer in dancehall music, analogous to the rapper, or MC in North American hip-hop.

Discotheque – In dancehall, a discotheque is a club with a permanently installed sound-system, in contrast to the mobile sound-systems who play special events on the road in addition to regular dances at their home “lawn.”

Downpress – Rastafarian word for “oppress,” created because the former term contains a morpheme that sounds like “up.” “Down-” is substituted because it more appropriately describes the interaction to which the word refers.

Family (Kumina) – A local group, or congregation, of Kumina practitioners.

A foreign – General Jamaican-English term for the places outside of Jamaica where some Jamaicans go to work, where they sometimes put down roots, and from which they sometimes send letters or even money. Usually Somewhere in the US, Canada, or the UK.

Funde – The central drum in the Nyabingi drum ensemble. Tonally in the middle, between the double-headed bass and the high pitched repeater, this drum carries the double-pulse beat at the heart of the Nyabingi rhythm.

Grater – Important part of the Kumina ensemble, made from a coconut grater, rubbed with a spoon. The grater player keeps a cadence that mirrors the catta sticks, but the grater player is usually a woman, and never takes a turn playing the drums, instead calling out and singing songs, taking part, with the drummer, in guiding the Kumina ritual, by choosing when and how to play the songs, and choosing when to switch from bailo songs to country songs.

Grounation – Rastafarian term referring to their multi-day retreat to chant and pray in a tabernacle, where worshippers drum and sing, keeping the Nyabingi rhythm all through the night into the morning, and then right around to the next night with only a lull around mid-day.

Gumbay – Square drum of the Leeward Maroons, also used among some nearby non-maroons in Jonkonnu celebrations. A similar, rectangular, drum is also used by Maroons from the Scots Hall settlement in the Windward Maroon area.

Gun lyrics – Gun violence is a popular theme among some dancehall deejays. The verbal violence is directed against specific rival performers or the “sound-bwoy,” a generalized stand-in for any member of a rival sound-system crew.

Higes-knots – According to John Homiak (1995), this term refers to the way Igellic Rastafarians, associated with the Wareika Hill commune near Kingston, moved around the city in groups, carrying on daily business and political activism.

I and I – Rastafarian linguistic innovation, closely related to the egalitarian ethic that is central to their religious philosophy. Can be used to mean “I,” “we,” “us,” “you and I,” or a generalized “one.” Intended to emphasize equality and unity among human beings.

Iditation – Rastafarian modification of the word “meditation,” where “I-” is substituted for “me-,” which is reasoned to be a selfish sounding morpheme. In practice, Iditation is the prayerful, introspective state of mind sought by Rastafarians during their retreats, known as “grounation,” or simply, “Nyabingi.”

Inna – Jamaican patois for “in.”

Ital – Rastafarian term meaning wholesome, pure, or good. Perhaps derived from “vital.”

Jerk chicken – Signature Jamaican dish. Chicken, slow grilled over a smoky fire of green pimento wood, flavored with a sweet-and-spicy sauce. Recipes vary, but usually include molasses, cinnamon, scotch-bonnet peppers, nutmeg, and thyme.

JLP – The Jamaica Labour Party. The more “conservative” of the two main political parties in Jamaica. The party of former Prime Minister Edward Seaga.

Jonkonnu – Festival celebrated around Christmas time by enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Anglophone Caribbean, going back as far as the 18th century, even in some areas of the Southern U.S. Features of the celebration include masked musical processions, all-night dances, and exchanging gifts.

Keep a show – A turn of phrase I encountered with Jamaican musicians, meaning to put on, or produce a performance. Refers especially to the preparation work, set-up and business end of the show, rather than to the performance itself.

Kete – One of the three main Nyabingi drums (bass, funde, and kete), and of them the highest in pitch. Also called the “repeater,” or “cutter.” Like the cyas drum in Kumina, the kete is used by the most experienced drummer present, and takes the musical role of elaborating and improvising over the steady pulse of the background rhythm.

Kindah – Leeward Maroon word meaning “one family,” also the name of a sacred site in the village of Accompong Town, the “Kindah Tree.” This site is central to the rituals performed during the January 6th festival: it is the site where the sacrifice is prepared, and becomes the site of drumming, dancing, and possession by spirits.

Kromanti (_ play, _ drum, _ dance, _ language) – Derived from the name of a slaver fort on the coast of West Africa, “Coromantyne,” this label became a *de facto* ethnic grouping among slaves on the plantations and among the Maroons who escaped slavery. Regional similarities among the group’s languages and cultures allowed them to forge strong bonds and thus they came to dominate the cultural and linguistic development of both Maroon societies and Jamaican “Creole” society, the descendants of the slaves. Among today’s Maroons, Kromanti refers to the most valued, and guarded, segment of their heritage, such as the drums, dances, rituals, and song texts used in their most sacred religious rituals.

Kumina – Jamaican, Myalistic religion, said to be derived from or at least strongly influenced by the religious practices brought by people from Congo region of central Africa, who came to Jamaica voluntarily in the mid-19th century (Schuler 1980).

Lawn – Enclosed outdoor space used for dance parties in Jamaica. A lawn can be permanently dedicated to this function, or can be improvised from some other space, like the way the people in Accompong turn their “parade ground” into a lawn using temporarily constructed walls and make-shift electrical wiring.

Livity – Rastafarian philosophical concept. Means “quality of life,” or “way of living.” One’s “livity” may be “ital” (wholesome and pure) or may be defiled by impure or unwholesome diet, hygiene, or social relations.

Mannish water – Signature Jamaican folk cuisine, this is a brothy stew made from the head of a goat. This dish is said to have the property of enhancing male libido, hence the term “mannish.” Often sold by vendors at festivals and dancehall events.

Massive – Dancehall term for referring to the audience collectively.

Murderation – Dancehall term for the violence alluded to in lyrical texts.

Myal, myalism – General term for Afro-Jamaican folk religion. Myal refers to a possessing spirit, and rituals seeking to communicate with, appease, or gain the help of the spirits (both ancestral spirits and the forces of nature) form the core of myalistic practice. Though “myalism” once referred to the social, healing practices of female spiritual leaders who struggled against the harmful, antisocial, male-centered sorcery called obeah, today the distinction between these faded so that they are sometimes used interchangeably.

Native Baptist – Afro-Jamaican synthesis of the radical protestant Christianity brought to Jamaica by Baptist Missionaries in the late 18th century. Also served as a primary vehicle of abolitionist political goals of educating, converting, and politicizing the population of enslaved people so they could advocate for their own emancipation.

NTDC – National Theatre Dance Company (of Jamaica). Established during Jamaica’s struggle for independence, this organization played a prominent role in educating the masses of Jamaicans about the cultural wealth of their own national heritage.

Nyabingi – Originally the name of an anti-colonialist secret society in what is now Uganda, this term was appropriated by mid-20th century Rastafarians and applied to their complex of sacred rituals, drums, and drum rhythms. According to Rastafarians, the term means “death to white and black oppressors.”

Obeah – Mode of Afro-Jamaican religious practice associated with sorcery, and harmful or anti-social magic. (see Myalism, above)

Overstand – Rastafarian modification of the word “understand.” “Over-” replaces “under-” as a more appropriate position from which one can gain thorough knowledge and comprehension of a thing or idea.

PNP – The People’s National Party. The more “liberal” of the two major parties in Jamaican national politics. The party of former Prime Minister Michael Manley, the PNP is currently in power in Jamaica under the leadership of Prime Minister P. J. Patterson.

Prenting – Sacred drum of the Windward Maroons of Moore Town, also known as the Kromanti drum. Similar in size and shape to the Rastafarian funde drum, this drum’s head is attached and tuned using a complex web of cords and wedges.

Pukumina/Pocomaina/Poco – Myalistic folk-religious practice strongly influenced revivalism, but more ambivalent than radical protestants about rejecting myalistic eudemonism.

Pull-up – performance tactic used by dancehall selectas and deejays, where they interrupt the music to exhort the audience, or massive, demanding engagement, and trying to build excitement.

Reasoning – A daily religious practice among Rastafarians, where “Idren” (brethren) gather to discuss scripture, debate politics, make music, and pray together, sometimes while smoking ganja through a ceremonial chalice.

Repeater – alternate term for the kete, the highest pitched of the three drums used in Nyabingi.

Revivalism – Refers to the many local radical Christian sects that grew out of the Native Baptist movement, including those called “Convince,” “Zion,” and “Bedwardism.” Historically and socially antecedent to Rastafarianism as well, although Rastafarians are often critical of and politically at odds with Revivalist groups.

Rewind – performance tactic used by dancehall selectas and deejays, where they play part of a song, and then manually spin the record backward to the beginning of the song and either play it again, or switch to a different tune. Like the pull-up, this maneuver is intended to elicit a response from the audience, and the deejay demands that the massive show their excitement and approval by cheering and flashing their cigarette lighters over their heads.

Roots – In the context of dancehall music, roots is a style of performance and presentation that emphasizes Rastafarian identity and values.

Roots wine/ roots tonic/ bitters – Jamaican folk-medicinal tradition. Steeped and sometimes partially fermented these drinks sometimes contain ten or more botanical ingredients. Traditionally marketed informally by higglers and street vendors, several commercially bottled brands are now available.

Rum-shop – A common type of small-business Jamaica, these establishments are rarely more than one-room shacks, and sometimes are little more than a small folding table by the roadside. These stores usually sell a variety of goods ranging from rum, beer, sodas, gasoline (by the liter in reused rum bottles) and canned food, to phone cards, newspapers, ganja, and dancehall mix-tapes.

Seal ground – Sacred sites within the landscape of Accompong Town (and elsewhere in Jamaica) where rituals are held, and where processions pause to salute and entertain the spirits during festival marches. Idea of “seal grounds” is derived from Revivalism.

Selecta – Musical performer in Jamaican dancehall, specialist in using dual record turntables along with digital sampler to create the musical background over which the deejay delivers his verbal performance. Analogous to the DJ, or turntablist, in North American Hip Hop.

Shaka – Musical instrument, like maracas or other shakers used in Caribbean musics. Important component of the Kumina musical ensemble. Like the grater, the shakas may be played by a woman, and shaka players are usually active in dancing and singing.

Slackness – General Jamaican slang term for immoral or lewd behavior. Derived from “moral slackness,” or looseness.

Sound-system, sound-system clash, sound-system crew – In the context of Jamaican dancehall, the term “sound-system” refers not only to the physical means of production (speakers, amplifiers, turntables), but also to the social organization that participates in that production (performers, technicians, managers, crew members, fans). In a sound-system clash, two or more of these material and social groupings are arrayed against each other in musical and stylistic competition, in the same dancehall space.

Spliff – a ganja cigarette.

Tabernacle – In the practice of the Rastafarian Nyabingi, or Grounation, the tabernacle is a circular, thatch-roofed building which houses the altar, drum orchestra, and sacred fire, and where ritual proceedings take place.

Talk-over – Basic performative mode of the dancehall deejay, where he (or she) delivers an improvised verbal performance over instrumental versions of popular songs.

Trod – Rastafarian term for journey or travel, as in, “Tomorrow, I and I will make a trod to town.”

Wiss – Afro-Jamaican term for a vine or and climbing plant. Some specific species of wiss are used medicinally, and one kind is used in the construction of Kumina drums.

Word-sound power – Rastafarian religious principle at work behind their broad ranging alteration of Jamaican English to suit their ideological needs. The idea is that, just as the creator spoke the world into being, that we shape the world we live in with the power inherent in the words we use. Therefore, we can work against the suffering and wickedness in the world by carefully considering the words we use, and creatively injecting positivity and social consciousness into our daily discourse. Both language and diet are important aspects of Ital livity.

Yard – Jamaican slang for “home.” “A mi yard” is synonymous with “at home” in standard English. Perhaps results from the practice of extending the living space of the home outside of the house, into the yard, where much of a family’s activities take place, like cooking, socializing, etc. The term is also used to refer to the island of Jamaica by Jamaicans traveling or working abroad, or “a foreign,” as they might say, as in “I’ve worked in Miami for years, but I go down yard every Christmas.”

VITA

R. Eric Dickerson was born on March 2, 1973, in Zachary, Louisiana, and after moving around southeastern Louisiana, and even a short stay in Idaho, he graduated from Baker High School in 1991. As a working college student, he studied humanities and fine arts at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Louisiana State University, and Austin Community College, while working in special education, food service, and construction, until he returned to LSU and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology in 1999. Throughout his adult life he has maintained an avid participation in music, from his own amateur practice and performances as a singer and player of guitar and saxophone, to attending massive concerts and festivals as a critically engaged audience member.

Inspired by musical collaborations and personal revelations, he returned again to Louisiana State University in 2001, intent on studying the music and culture of the African Diaspora, and intuitively following social, cultural, and historical connections between African American musics and those of African Caribbean societies, particularly the musics of Jamaicans. His other research interests include: the Blues, New Orleans' musics, marching bands and processions, festivals and religious holidays, nationalism, cultural poetics and place, movements of cultural revitalization, and processes of linguistic and cultural creolization. He is currently working toward a Master of Arts degree at Louisiana State University.